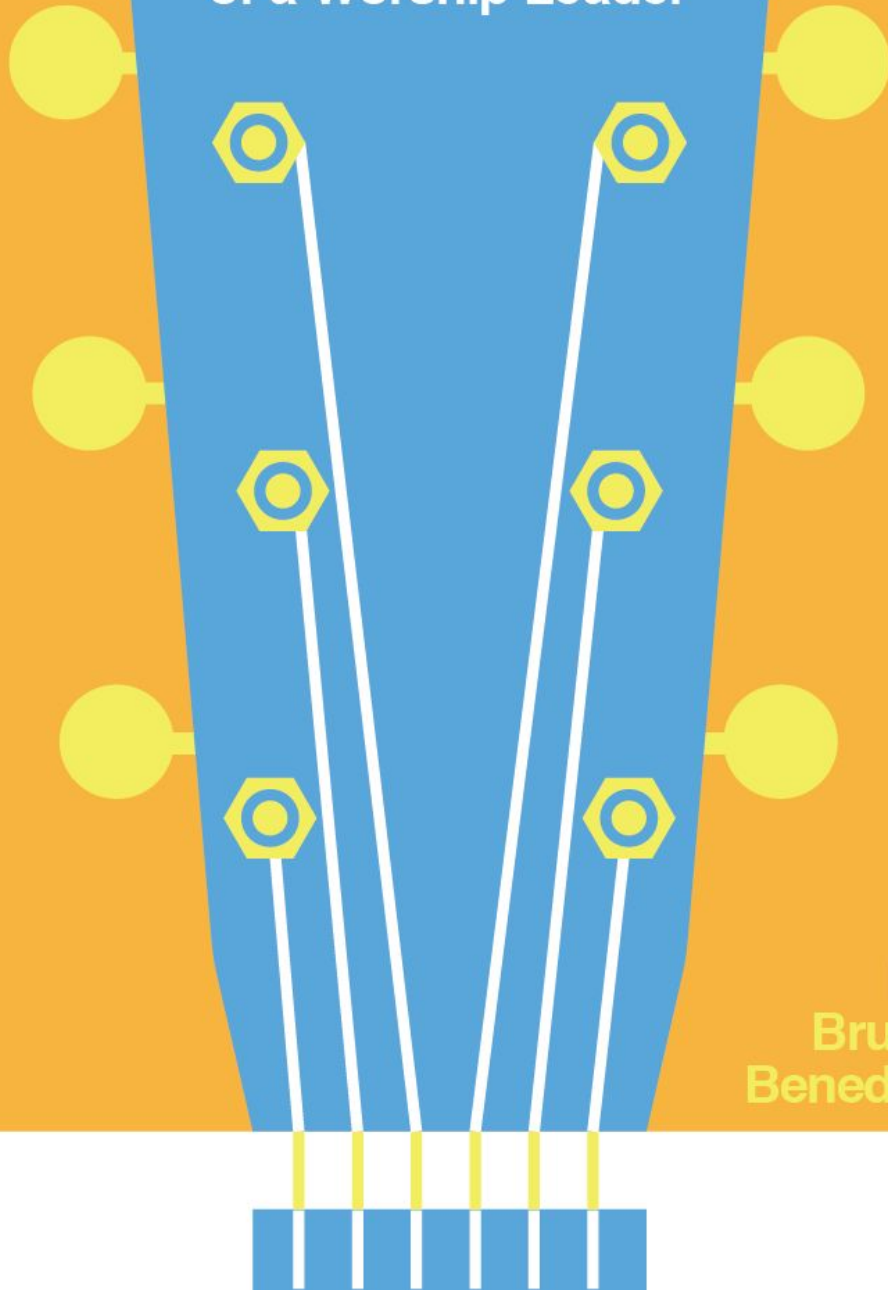


The Six Pegs of a Worship Leader



By
Bruce
Benedict

The Six Tuning-Pegs of a Worship Leader

/By Bruce Benedict

//For Awakening - 2018

1. A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST
2. A SPIRITUAL SHEPHERD
3. A MUSICIAN
4. A STEWARD
5. A CURATOR
6. A CALLING BY GOD

Introduction:

QUOTES:

"Christian musicians know of the obligation to make music as agents of God's grace. They make music graciously, whatever its kind or style, as ambassadors of Christ, showing love, humility, servanthood, meekness, victory, and good example . . . Music is freely made, by faith, as an act of worship, in direct response to the overflowing grace of God in Christ Jesus."

— Harold Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*

"If someone were to ask Adam, "when do you worship God?" He might reply, "when do we not!" Worship isn't something other, external, compartmentalized, or confined. It is life with God, lived unto God for his glory and our pleasure."

— Mike Cospers, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel*

"The corporate worship experience allows the cultivation of a self that one cannot accomplish on one's own...more than merely regulating moods or a sense of reality, music is a resource for creating and sustaining a self."

— Gerardo Marti, *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation*.

"We sing to God because he first sang to us (Zeph 3:17)." — William Edgar, *Taking Note of Music*

When I was 16 years old I tried out for the varsity basketball team the same week of auditions for the school musical. I knew the choir director from my church and somehow she convinced me to audition for the musical..and then somehow I got a lead part!?! Part of me never wanted to be in the musical but I was curious because I knew that I had some music gifts and I deeply respected and trusted my choir director (her name was Terri Willard). The experience ended up changing my life. I took God more serious. My curiosity was stoked to further explore this mysterious thing called music/art in my life. I started writing songs. I started helping with music at Young Life and leading worship for my youth group. That year rocked my life - it was a conversion of sorts. Although I had already given my life to Jesus I didn't know how powerful beauty was in my relationship with God. Helping

to participate as a leader and cultivate beauty for others made the world more alive and helped me to see Jesus in all of his glory and majesty.

Ever since I've been obsessed with Jesus, His Father and the Holy Spirit and the mysterious way that they continually pour out their love on our fragile, broken lives. They make everything a wonder and they fill everything with the potential of sound - from creation, to the summer thunderstorm, to the particular instruments and bodies we occupy in movement and sonics for gathered worship.

As you launch into this Awakening week journey I hope that it brings Jesus into a bright focus and in his illuminating light you realize the mysterious gifts fomenting in each of your hearts - just ready to burst out into the shepherding hands of the Holy Spirit! And don't forget what a blessing it is to have so many 'elders' and mentors pouring into you. Each of us requires a village of support and wisdom to move along in our callings towards God.

May you hear the voice of the Father singing his love over you this week! (Zeph 3:17)

Peace,

Bruce Benedict

Chaplain of Worship and Arts,

Hope College

As a fun and familiar analogy for the essential skills that each worship leader needs to develop I use the six tuning-pegs of a guitar to illustrate the key areas where we need to pursue God in cultivating our calling and competencies: Each tuning-peg and "string" exist within every worship leader but must be 'tuned' with all of the others for the instrument to work effectively and beautifully. I know that some of you here are dancers, and others may lead on various instruments such as drums or organ - please forgive my limited analogy! Also, the term "worship leader" is sometimes confusing as it is God that truly leads our worship - but because most of you will be familiar with the term I pray that it effectively gets across what I hope to accomplish, namely exploring the role of the worship leader as:

The WORSHIP LEADER as:

- (1) Follower of Christ
- (2) Spiritual Shepherd
- (3) Musician
- (4) Steward
- (5) Curator
- (6) Called by God

1. Worship Leader as Follower of Christ

"Christian musicians must be particularly cautious. They can create the impression that God is more present when music is being made than when it is not; that worship is more possible with music than without it; and that God might possibly depend on its presence before appearing."

—Harold Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*

"When we forget that, we unwittingly reduce God's ways to our ways and God's thoughts to our thoughts. Our hearts become factories of idols in which we fashion and refashion God to fit our needs and desires."

— Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*

"Every hymn of praise is a little anti-idolatry campaign ... When we sing 'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,' we are also saying 'Down with the gods from whom no blessings flow.'"

— John Witvliet, *A More Profound Alleluia*

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

—Jesus (Matthew 11:28-30)

"Jesus at the center of it all, Jesus at the center of it all

From beginning to the end, It will always be it's always been You Jesus"

—Israel Houghton, "*Jesus at the Center*"

"Lord Jesus, holy and majestic are you in your high places. You are the center of all life, and from you all life flows. Beautiful and majestic were you also while you dwelled with man. Even when you were the Center where humiliations and sorrows met."

—Christina Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*

Every single one of us is a ravenous worshipper. We are born with an insatiable desire to worship - doesn't matter whether it is dead or alive, gold or power, prestige or popularity we will worship it. Our entire life is a battle to worship the right things - to worship the 'living' God and not some dead thing. To worship in 'spirit' and 'truth' and not in ignorance and lies. It's so bad that one pastor once referred to our hearts as little 'idol factories.' So how do we go about making God the 'king of our heart' so that when can help lead others to Him?

First we have to know, love, be immersed in, count no other story of worth but God's story!

In the beginning God created us as part of his beautiful sinless creation. But then our

worship got broken and we started to love false things and seek the good of ourselves over others. It eventually got so cosmically destructive that God sent his only son Jesus into the universe to rescue us, redeem us, live and die for us, to wrestle us back to the Father.

Even in Christ we still struggle on a daily basis to love God - and in fact we can't without his Holy Spirit. It was a promise that Jesus made to us - that he would leave us the heavenly gift to care for us until he returns! And there's the reason we need daily time with God, and weekly time with a church body - because these help to remind us and refill us with God's living truth and spirit!! We are sinful people in desperate need of a savior - we call this the *gospel* - the good news of God's never-ending, never-failing, never-fleeing love.

Daily worship helps to recenter our lives on the story of God! A God that created all things in his image - good and beautiful, that in our sin and disobedience the world was broken and the beauty marred - but then Jesus came and spilled his blood to purify us and in the end Jesus will come again and invite us to a wedding feast to celebrate HIM, the living Savior of the universe. We call this Christ-centered worship - This is the image of Revelation 7 - Jesus on the throne in the center of everything. A vision so wonderful, and terrible, and beautiful, and holy that we simply can't take our eyes off of him!

So give everything to him, and rest in him - his power is so great that he can bear our burdens (as heavy and discouraging as they often feel!) and set us free to worship him, and hopefully point others to him! Jesus has a lot of sanctifying work to do in all of our lives - we are in desperate need of encouragement, and correction and healing, and empowerment, and courage, and hope. Jesus will give us all of these things - as we daily seek him through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now go and fight the good fight. Jesus pursues you → open yourself up to him. Jesus loves you → so allow yourself to be loved. Jesus never sees us alone → but always as part of his beautiful bride the church. So go pursue God's people! Acts 2:42 gives us a shape for this. Gather with God's people. Pray. Sing. Study the Scriptures. Share daily bread. The Father is singing his love over you! (Zeph 3:17)

2. Worship Leader as Spiritual Shepherd

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake..." —Psalm 23, King James Version

"As worship leaders, we have the important and terrifying task of placing words of prayer on people's lips. It happens every time we choose a song and write a prayer. We also have the holy task of being stewards of God's Word. Our choices of Scripture and themes for worship represent a degree of control over people's spiritual diets, over how they feed on the bread of life. For holy tasks such as these, the church needs more than craftspeople, coordinators, and performers, and none with the hubris to be spiritual engineers. The church needs pastoral people to plan and lead its worship."

—John Witvliet, Pastoral Worship Leading

"Multicultural worship is not entertainment. It is an act of solidarity with communities we may never meet"

— Sandra Van Opstal, *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World*

"Every musical groove we establish is a potential rut. Every way of worshiping is a potential object of worship."

— Reggie Kidd, *Bach, Bubba, and the Blues: The Singing Savior's Many Voices*

"The musician is also called to 'till and keep' his environment. As ruler over God's world, he (or she) must find his place in the world of music and attend to its becoming a lovely environment for his dwelling and a glory to God."

— William Edgar, *Taking Note of Music*

As worship leaders we are caught up in a cosmic conundrum. We are attempting to lead people to a place that we believe is true but have never been too. How in the world do you lead people to a place you have never been? I'm pretty sure my Dad once told me that it's impossible to lead people to a place where you have never been (Paper map anyone??).

Typically to know how to get somewhere is to know the path, the pitfalls, the rest stops, the

best food joints, how to pace yourself (are we there yet??) and what you need once you get there!

That is why we are people of faith, hope and love - they are fuel for the crazy daily journey of faith! Because while we know the destination and the end of the journey (Jesus) we have no idea what our path (singularly or collectively) will be to that point. There are going to be some smooth spots, some rough patches, some terrifying situations and some moments of anointed glory!

In the scriptures the role of the shepherd is often used as both an example and metaphor for the LORD. (see Psalm 23). And in the New Testament Jesus takes up the mantle of this image to describe himself. Jesus is the shepherd of the sheep. The sheep which are God's people know him, recognize his voice, and come when he calls. He cares for them and protects them. Jesus even gives this role to us as a temporary job description until he returns! In Acts 20:28 the Apostle Paul says, *Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.*

So what does it mean to "keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock"? First it means that we must care for ourselves - we need to eat and sleep well, have sabbath, and daily time with the Lord that is full of repentance and study and worship. Only secondarily can we keep watch over the flock of God. First, we need to know the flock individually - their names, their stories, their struggles and strengths. Then we can think about what they are as a larger group - who has been there for a long time? Who is relatively new and uncomfortable? And even who is missing from our congregation that *should* be there! Each "flock" is an endlessly unique collection of needs, personalities, quirks, strengths and struggles. As we gather regularly to lead this flock let Ephesians 5:15-19 and Colossians 3:15-17 be our guide:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to

the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

We are engaged in the holy task of feeding God's people from the pastures of the scriptures and the church - full of prayers and songs to be prayed, sung, and studied - we are cultivating and crafting the spiritual diet of God's people. This is work we must pursue with fear and trembling!!

Further reading:

- The Worship Pastor, Zac Hicks
- Worship Leading as a Spiritual Task, John Witvliet
- Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel, Mike Cospoer

3. Worship Leader as a Musician

"To listen seriously to music and to perform it are among our most potent ways of learning what it is to live with and before God." — Rowan Williams

"I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation i will praise you."

— Hebrew 2:12, quoting Psalm 22:22

"People haven't always been there for me but music always has." — Taylor Swift

"Our faith is a sung faith. The people of God sing in war and peace, victory and defeat, celebration and lament. We sing an ancient song that climaxes in the hazy but hope-filled future. We sing as living people among the dead. — Mike Cosper, Rhythms of Grace

"Applause, everyone. Bravo, bravissimo!

Shout God-songs at the top of your lungs!" — Psalm 47 (The Message)

"If I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician. I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music." — Albert Einstein

To be a worship leader is to be someone who loves music - who eats, sleeps and even daydreams in music - who, as the quote above captures - see's their life in terms of the elements of music. And this is all a gift of God to the glory of God! From the Song of Moses in Exodus 15 to the Song of the Lamb in Revelation 15 the scriptures are exploding with songs. The largest book of the bible is a book of prayers and songs (2,461 verses long!). When Jesus comes the Gospels announce it with songs. At the end when everything is made new again the heavens and earth resound with song (Rev 21,22). God loves music. And so do we! You only have to spend a minute of your day walking around, exploring youtube or spotify to see and hear that music is everywhere - so what does it mean to be a musician that distinctly attempts to steward it for God's glory?

Here are some biblically informed ideas for how we can shepherd music in our leading:

- *Music is a response to God's deliverance* - In Exodus 15 when God delivers the Hebrews from the Egyptians at the Red Sea Miriam and the women of God immediately erupt into praise. We sing to God because he has rescued us! (Luke 1) And even more so in Jesus Christ! This is why there is always new songs to sing! (Psalm 33:3, Rev.5:9)
- *Music teaches us about God* - the longest song in the Bible is Psalm 119 which is a alphabetical exploration of the WORD of God. Our songs will never exhaust the riches of God and his mercy. (See Psalm 136).
- *Music is a gift that unifies and edifies the body of Christ* - Colossians 3:16 says "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Our worship should always be both expressive and formative - we should always seek to grow both in knowledge and love - Spirit and truth!
- *Music is a gift that reaches every emotion and place of life* - There is no emotion under heaven that isn't expressed in the psalms. Whether it is the heights of praise (Psalm 96) or the depths of depression (Psalm 130) - whether it is intimacy with God (Psalm 139) or the majestic worship of kings (Psalm 24).
- *Music is at the center of who God is* - so handle it with great care! - In Revelation 5 we see all of creation surrounding the throne of God and the Lamb SINGING to God. In the mystery of God music is a way that we can be unified as the body of Christ and give our entire selves over to God. Music should always unify and encourage - this is a serious reflection when we realize the ways that music divides and separates the church (whether it is age, genre, style, culture, etc)

Now what about the actual practice of music making? There are three things here we must attend to (1) The art of practice, (2) The art of rehearsal, and (3) the art of performance.

First we need to practice. This is often done privately where an individual over months and years builds their competencies related to their instrument or voice. Sometimes this is through formal lessons and other times developed through self study or community activity.

One of my first memories as a child was sitting in church watching my father direct the congregational singing. I grew up at a small country church where our pianist was over 70 years old. She had a hymnal on the piano but rarely turned the pages because she knew most of them by heart. Music was something that we loved so much that it was like breathing.

Now in this section I often use *music* and *songs* interchangeably which can be a bit confusing. And just so I don't get in trouble with the music teachers here is a formal definition of music to ponder!

- Music is not a universal language - music can function very differently between cultures and as western's we must be careful NOT to impose our views of music on other cultures.
- The art of sound in time that expresses ideas and emotions in significant forms through the elements of rhythm, melody, harmony, and color.
- "the art of combining vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion"

???At first glance, this principle seems to be obvious. Of course a worship leader must be a musician. However, there is much here for reflection and consideration that garners our attention. First off, what does scripture have to say about the nature of a musician that participates in the worship of God's service? In Gen 4:21, we find our first mention of a musician, Jubal, who is the father of all who play harp and flute. When Moses (Deut 31:19)¹¹ establishes the leadership of God's people after Mt. Sinai we find that the Levites are appointed as the musicians of God's people.¹² Musicians play a central role in the worship of the Israelites throughout the Old Testament and a prominent one in temple worship, especially during the Davidic and Solomonic reigns.¹³ During the Babylonian captivity and the destruction of the temple, musi²⁷icians declined in importance as the

synagogue and the Torah occupied the worship of the Jews. During the establishment of the early church in the 1st century, music again becomes a more prominent aspect of worship as the Greek and Jewish cultures intermingled their respective heritages. Here, however, we know that plain unaccompanied singing was the thrust of musical practice. Finally, in Revelation we are caught up in the expansive amount of singing and worshipping before the throne in heaven. Revelation as a model and picture of heavenly worship inspires us as worship leaders to understand how our leading the congregation's song participates in that heavenly picture beneath the Cherubim and Seraphim in Revelation 4:6-11. What does it mean to be a church musician in the day-to-day activities of the church? Donald Hustad in *Jubilate II*, states that, "the best music ministers consider themselves principally to be music educators who work in the context of the church".¹⁴ Many, if they have the training and time, work to educate the children and adults of the church in the basics of music theory and good vocal technique.

Here a word needs to be offered to the wide spectrum of talent and training in worship leaders. Those that help to lead the music and worship of our churches range from volunteer mothers to full-time individuals with Doctorates.

No matter what level of skill or training you have achieved there are five basic areas that every individual should seek to have a basic grasp of:

- (1) the basics of music theory, history, literature and performance,
- (2) the ability to teach music and musicianship to others,
- (3) "the philosophy and administration of church music, worship, hymnology, and church music history and literature",
- (4) a functional understanding of basic audio and video technologies, and
- (5) a general comprehension of the scriptures and basic theological principles of the Christian faith.

Granted there is enough in this list to occupy a life-time of study but for most of us it is a gradual process of maturation as we seek to improve our love for God and grow in our abilities.

I would conclude this section with three observations: (1) that you commit yourselves to being a growing student in your ministry trade, (2) that you understand that music is a means to an end and not an end in itself (which is only God's Glory),¹⁶ (3) that you challenge yourself and others in the areas of excellence for God's glory and the edification of the Body of Christ.

- **Thoughts on songwriting, Audio and tech concerns,**

Further Reading:

- Music through the eyes of Faith, Harold Best
- Taking Note of Music, William Edgar
- Seven Rules for Congregational Singing , John Wesley (founder of Methodism)

4. WORSHIP LEADER AS STEWARD

"Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration."

— Thomas A. Edison

"In the loss of skill, we lose stewardship; in losing stewardship we lose fellowship; we become outcasts from the great neighborhood of Creation." — Wendell Berry

Music's not something which can just wash over us. It needs us to sacrifice something of ourselves to meet it, and it's very difficult sometimes to do that, especially the whole culture we're in. Sacrifice and self-sacrifice – certainly sacrificing your time – is not valued anymore."

— James MacMillan, composer

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." — 1 Peter 4:10

You aren't a worship leader for long before you realize that performing on stage is truly about 1% of the job. After spending time with God, caring for your own soul, meeting with your volunteers, struggling with some personal practice, sending emails, planning out the services, prepping the slides or bulletin, setting up the stage, and rehearsing the musicians - Sunday is literally just an hour or two of the whole week! So how are we supposed to think about all of the other hours? Should we resent them? We can get frustrated with volunteers who don't show up, or are unrehearsed. We can get angry with our pastoral staff for changing or requesting things at the last minute...OR we can be about the stewardship of God's creation and the ministry of his grace to his creation. ... all of this background work is profoundly part of the stewardship of the calling!

There is no getting around the intense material world of worship. Even if you are leading worship in a house church you still need a few instruments (that have to be tuned, need maintenance, etc), song-sheets, and a space where people can comfortably hang out. Even the Quaker movement typically has a house of worship!

I typically break down the areas of stewardship into four categories that help me to balance the demands of the work. The first and most important area of stewardship is people (and their time and talents). God has gifted you with amazing volunteers who each need particular care depending on their age, availability, and giftedness. The second area of stewardship is materials - this includes everything from the instruments, to the music, to your sound system and space. Most ministries have limited resources that need to be used to the best of their abilities! The third area of stewardship is your own time - how are you balancing all of the demands of your work? While it's different for everyone you need to have a general plan for how you will use your time (meetings, planning, equipment upkeep, etc).

So how should think spiritually about all of this? First off we need to remember that both time and creation are a gift from the Lord and are intended to be cared for and cultivated. While the term "steward" might be unfamiliar to you it's a great word that captures the idea of Matthew 25 where the servants is called into account for the talents given. We don't 'own' the ministry in any sense but have been given it as a gift and responsibility to care for, to manage, and to cultivate. God is the one who plants the seeds, who gives the sun and rain, the volunteers and the resources - we simple do the best we can with thankfulness to direct them as we are gifted and equipped by God - encouraged by his people, and commissioned by the church.

It's amazing to read scripture from Genesis to Revelation and to consider all of the moments where God is building something creative - festivals and buildings, instruments, songs, etc. Each of these require an exhaustive and diligent care of people, time, and resources! God cares deeply about every aspect of his creation and how they are shepherded into His service!

What part of the behind the scenes work frustrates you the most? How can you give that frustration to God? Maybe you need to work on delegating those things to others? Maybe you need to acquire more skills to perform those tasks easier? Maybe there are things that simply don't need as much attention as you think? Whatever this work this - administration, technical needs, people managements, space cultivation - it is all work that the Lord is aware of and desires to be done to his glory!

1 Chronicles 15:22 - Kenaniah the head Levite was in charge of the singing; that was his responsibility because he was skillful at it.

5. WORSHIP LEADER AS CURATOR

- We are striving to be good storytellers
- Liturgy is short-hand, a condensed form, of the full story of salvation.
- Liturgy helps us to keep the whole story in perspective and to tell the parts of the story that we might want to minimize or ignore all together (lament, injustice, etc)

QUOTES:

We are not called to know every theological detail, nor to unravel every theological question. What we do need is the ability to step back and keep the whole story in prospective and to know its broad outlines and themes." — Paul Westermeyer, *The Church Musician*

"It is fruitless to search for a single musical style, or even any blend of musical styles, that can assist all Christians with true worship. The followers of Jesus are a far too diverse group of people – which is exactly as it should be. We need to welcome the experimental creativity that is always searching out new ways of singing the gospel, and banish the fear that grips us when familiar music passes away. For this kind of change is the mark of a living church – the church of a living God, who restlessly ranges back and forth across the face of the earth seeking out any who would respond to his voice."

— David Hamilton, 'The Triumph of the Praise Songs,' *Christianity Today*, 8/12/99

"Though multiethnic worship may not increase the statistical diversity of a congregation, it will communicate its values. Hospitality to and solidarity with people on the margins, and mutuality and connection with the global church are not means to an end but part of the kingdom work of God's people"

— Sandra Maria Van Opstal, *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World*

In some churches, you might even hear a leader say, "Our worship time is over, and now it's time for teaching." Singing psalms and hymns and songs of praise is terrific! It's non-negotiable. Once we've

been united with Christ, we can't help but praise! But praise is not the only thing that we do in a worship service. It is only one part of our covenantal conversation with God.

— John Witvliet, *On the Three Meanings of the Term Worship*

"The day has come for us to mute our provincial songs, and start listening for His voice, for it is 'like the sound of many waters' (Revelation 1:15), as rich and complex as the constitution of His people."

— Reggie Kidd, *With One Voice*

"...written words stimulate and liberate the imagination. Images, on the other hand, usually captivate the imagination."

— Shane Higgs, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*

"Good artists borrow, great artists steal."

— Pablo Picasso

"Liturgy creates a universe brimming with fruitful spiritual life, and allows the soul to wander about in it at will and to develop itself there. The abundance of prayers, ideas, and actions, and the whole arrangement of the calendar are incomprehensible when they are measured by the objective standard of strict suitability for a purpose."

— Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*

The 'art' of being a worship leader is the art of being a 'curator.' To be a curator is to be an interdisciplinary artist that creates by lovingly stewarding and sifting the creations of others - in our context the art is prayers, music, liturgy, space, technology, scripture, movement, etc. With these pieces we strive to rehearse, proclaim, reclaim, and re:envision the story of God in a beautiful, powerful, and compelling way for our particular time and place.

Thankfully God is the only original artist! After God we are all just borrowing, stealing, and refashioning to bring him glory, This frees us up to enjoy God with whatever feast we can cull together!

So! after we have spent with with the Lord, prayed for our people, practiced our craft, composed some emails and scheduled a few meetings we are ready to plan worship! For me this is where I get the most excited - here there are endless options and a never ceasing

flow of new songs and ideas to craft into potential worship! But immediately this can become totally overwhelming! How in the world are we expected to plan worship when we have at our fingertips thousands of songs, images, prayers, liturgies, videos? We need some boundaries! Great art is always inspired by boundaries, deadlines, and limits!

THE GOSPEL - *Proclaiming the Whole Story of God*

Our curatorial home should always be the scriptures - and more specifically the story of redemption woven through its pages. In the beginning God created the world and filled it with beauty, it was 'good.' But adam and eve sinned and brought shame and brokenness and alienation into the world. In the Old Testament we see a story of God's continual covenantal faithfulness - eventually, in the appointed time God sends his only son Jesus to be the fulfillment of God's love for his people. Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of every character archetype in the Old Testament. He is the perfect prophet, priest, and king. He is true savior, judge, redeemer and rescuer! On the cross Jesus takes the sin and brokenness of the whole universe on his shoulders and forever unites us to God. From the grave Jesus resurrects to new life and welcomes his disciples into this new life. Then Jesus ascends back to the throne of heaven and gives the Holy Spirit as a heavenly gift of power and comfort until he returns at the end of time. This is the story of redemption - and in worship we can think of it this way! The scene in Acts 2 is often used as a biblical basis for ordering our worship. The disciples gather together to fellowship through song and prayer, read and preach the scriptures, and share a common meal. This is often referred to as the four-fold order.

Gathering

- (the story of creation & the fall)
- Praise & Adoration, Confession & Assurance

Word

- (The life of Jesus)
- Redemption - The story of the Gospel proclaimed from all of the scriptures.

Table

- (The story of the God's future promise to feast with his people)

- Communion - sustaining grace for God's people

Sending

- The building and the nurturing of the church
- The church is sent out to evangelize, baptize, and disciple

This week during Awakening you will get the opportunity to visit a number of churches that worship differently. There are such a rich variety of ways that the church has crafted to tell the story - and every tradition focuses on certain parts more than others. It is a constant joyful struggle to steward the story of God through the worship-arts!

LITURGY - *Worship Designed so that Everyone Can Participate!*

Every church has a liturgy - whether you are catholic or charismatic. 'Liturgy' is just a fancy word for talking about the order of your service. For some it is very simple - a time of singing and prayer followed by a sermon. For others it is much more complex with multiple layers of movement, song, prayer, scripture, sermon, offering, communion, etc. Every approach to planning worship has various benefits and drawbacks. But however you go about it you should seek to tell the whole story of God. One particular way that the does this is through the church calendar. This is a calendar guided not by the secular world but by the story of God - you probably know pieces of this but taken as a whole it roots our yearly worship life in the story of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (and not fads and fashions).

Advent/Christmas/Epiphany - tells the story of Christ's coming and his early years (covers the Old Testament and the beginnings chapters of the gospels).

Lent - tells the story of Christ's baptism and public ministry (covered by the gospels)

Holy Week - the end of Lent that covers Palms Sunday to the crucifixion of Jesus. Your church may celebrate Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday which we called the Holy Triduum (holy 3 days).

Easter - the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his time spent with the disciples proving his resurrection.

Ascension - the return of Jesus to the throne of heaven completing his obedience and mission on earth.

Pentecost - when Jesus sends the Holy Spirit down upon the disciples and the church, the bride of Christ is born.

As you continue to develop your skills working with a liturgy only reflect on how it engages everyone present. How do children engage with your services? How fully can the elderly or those with disabilities participate? What about those who might find too many words or too many movements a hindrance to being with God?

PRAYERS AND SONGS

For most worship leaders the majority of time spent in planning revolves around prayers and songs. While many of you won't be at churches that sing a ton of psalms you should strive to know them, pray them, and sing them. Jesus is a our model here - even on the cross he prayed and sang the psalms (Psalm 22). There are 150 psalms broken up into 5 books with various themes and focuses. The Psalms are an encyclopedic exploration of the emotions of the human heart and cover every approach of prayer - Praise, Adoration, Thanksgiving, Pilgrimage songs, Lament, etc.

When choosing songs I like to follow Zac Hicks simple guide:

- Choose songs that are contextually appropriate for your congregation (and then always try to stretch them too!). The songs we pick shouldn't be an unnecessary burden or distraction to worship!

- Be familiar with as much worship music as you can. The more worship music you know (hymns, psalms, praise songs, etc) the better choices you can make.

- For specific songs ask the questions:

- Is it singable for a wide variety of the congregation?

- Does the music complement the text?

- Is it theologically and biblically true and point us to God

- Can our musicians lead and perform it with excellence and in a culturally appropriate way.

As you continue to refine the way in which you pick songs it is absolutely beneficial to own a few hymnals and to study the thematic and theological categories listed. In our desire to sing the whole story of God do we have songs for all of the major aspects of our faith? Do we have songs of Lament? Do we have songs that can support times of confession? Do we have songs that proclaim the Triune God - Father, Son AND Holy Spirit? Do we have songs for the sacraments? Or for other seasons of the church. Just as every preacher crafts a new sermon each Sunday worship leaders with songwriting gifts should be writing new songs that will speak uniquely to their contexts in ways that other songs may not be able to.

VISUALS/MOVEMENT/SPACE/TECHNOLOGY

As we move beyond the core arts of music, text and liturgy we begin to encounter the expansive world of performing arts that can be utilized in public worship. In fact this week you will likely be exposed to all of these. Visual artists who bring their gifts to the service of God' worship. Dancers who worship with their bodies and help some of us to worship more unencumbered! Spaces such as Western Seminary Chapel and Dimnent Chapel which communicate various aspects of God and help us to feel both the intimacy and grandeur of the Triune God. And all of the crazy growth in technology that affects how we lead and receive worship...imagine that for most of the history of the church there was neither projection, electric instruments, nor sounds systems! All of these require skillful and humble use - none of them are neutral and all communicate in complex ways related to culture and use. Use them wisely!

As curators we have the holy calling of lovingly handling the creations of the past, the present, and the spirit indwelled future! We are like gardeners in this way. We enjoy the fruit of trees we never planted - sometimes this is local fruit and sometimes this is fruit from continents away! We cultivate (and prune!) the vines we regularly use, and we sow seeds and graft on new ideas (and pray) for the things that we dream we need for the future! Thankfully there is an endless harvest that won't cease even into the new heavens and new earth where we will bring the glory of the nations into the city of God (Rev 21.26).

6. Worship Leader as a Calling

"We're told over and over again that being a worship leader isn't about performance, but when we get feedback, it often targets places where the "performance" fell short. In one breath we're told it's not about us, and in the next we're thanked for ushering people into the presence of God. We're constantly marketed the latest release from celebrity worship leaders, and simultaneously told that we're not rock stars."

— Mike Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel*

"Certainly, our role as "shepherds" does not displace aspects of the other roles. We still cultivate gifts as clear and articulate speakers, technically proficient musicians, ingenious artists. We are still coordinators as we call meetings, run rehearsals, proofread copy. While we aren't spiritual engineers, we do—with fear and trembling—take the part of priests, placing words of prayer on people's lips that may well resonate deep within their soul and draw them, by the Spirit's power, closer to God"

— John Witvliet, *Planning and Leading Worship as a Pastoral Task*

"Reconciliation is not something we add to our worship; it is a practice in which we live out our true nature as one new humanity" — Sandra Van Opstal, *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World*

"Making the earth into a beautiful place. This is our high calling. It is not a utopian program nor is it one more social platform for improvement. We are called instead to 'show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light'" (1 Peter 2:9 ASV.)

— William Edgar, *Taking Note of Music*

"For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the musicians and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the musicians and the gatekeepers."

— Nehemiah 12:46-47a (NIV)

When Jesus initially called the disciples they had no idea what sort of journey they were in for, but they trusted in the one calling. As a worship leader you have been called by God to lead his people. You have been baptized into the church and are a child of God. You have

been empowered to shepherd and guard the flock. You have been given artistic gifts, entrusted with resources, and equipped with wisdom and guidance from the practice of the church, the scriptures, and the Holy Spirit.

In this particular age leading worship is bound up with a lot of cultural baggage related to performance and celebrity. Worship leading IS performing - but we perform as an act of hospitality not celebrity! And this is something that anyone can do - no matter your age or talent or particular way of leading worship. I know worship leaders who are shy but brilliant musicians - and some worship leaders who aren't great musicians but gifted in speaking. There is no one particular model or approach that is THE way to lead - we need to be attentive to how different cultures engage God in worship and how a calling to lead will manifest according to your talents/personality and the way that God is addressed in that particular culture/country/language, etc. It's a wonderful mystery how worship looks so different around the world (Don't get caught up in thinking that worship only looks like Hillsong, etc).

There are various ways that the church talks about what it means to serve in the realm of gathered worship. Some people may say that you have been 'anointed' to lead, others may say it is your spiritual gift! Some may say you have a 'calling', or that it is your future 'vocation.' While there are denominational differences and subtleties to these words and concepts they all contain the essence of God using everyone uniquely to build and beautify his Church! This is about God and his mission to build his kingdom on earth through foolish saints and broken sinners. We can only come to our callings through humility and service - this is the way of Christ (Phil 2).

Ultimately your unique calling is about creating a space where the Triune God can meet his people - in other words we are as much worship leaders as we are cultivators of hospitality - providing a beautiful space (Psalm 84) that is stocked with the Word, great music, and opportunities to pray and serve one another. A time when Jesus can sit with his church and those curious to experience him. A friend of mine says, "Of all our particular practices of worship, liturgies and beliefs, the thing that marks us the most is our hospitality - both to believers and strangers." Here we all respond to the invitation of Christ - sometimes strident, sometimes gentle - but always firm and unrelenting. While we adorn our calling

with the garb of melodies and materials we are primarily called to invite the body of Christ to come together to remember, proclaim, and become more like Jesus.

Conclusion

"The gospel is not the first 'step' in a 'stairway' of truths, rather, it is more like the 'hub' in a 'wheel' of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C's but the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom.

— Tim Keller, *The Centrality of the Gospel*

"Communal worship practices can be studied in many disciplines: art, music, dance, theater, communications, theology, history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and economics"

— John Witvliet, *Teaching Worship as a Christian Practice*

All of us here at the Awakening Institute @ Hope College are disciples of Jesus, students of worship-arts, and lovers of the church. We all bring various levels and years of experience to contribute to the communal conversation of life with God. We are all on a long journey of growth and maturity in our faith. There is so much more to learn and experience - but it's always made richer, brighter, and more joyful with sons and daughters of God. While this little book is in no way an exhaustive exploration of what it means to be a lead worshipper I hope you have learned something new, been encouraged in something you've known, and contributed new thoughts and ideas that will bless your faith and the places that you lead. Spend time with the Word. Sing your faith. And pray for the Kingdom come.

Further Reading:

John Witvliet, *Planning and Leading Worship as a Pastoral Task*

Bruce Benedict, and others, *Doxology and Theology: How the Gospel Forms the Worship Leader*.

WISHLIST OF EXTRA GEAR TO EXPLORE:

A - TEN CORE CONVICTIONS OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP (CICW)

B - APPROACHES TO PLANNING WORSHIP

C - STREAMS OF SONG: An overview of congregational song in the twenty-first century,
Michael Hawn

D - 30 HYMNS TO MEMORIZE BEFORE YOU DIE

E - DIFFERENT 'TYPES' OF WORSHIP LEADERS (Sandra Van Opstal)

F - FIVE PRAYER PRACTICES FOR WORSHIP

APPENDIX A

Approaches to Planning Worship

Planning Worship Directed by the Story of Creation

- Creation - Fall - Redemption - Consummation

Planning Worship According to the Church Calendar

- Advent/Christmas/Epiphany/Lent/Holy
Week/Easter/Ascension/Pentecost/Ordinary Time

Planning Worship According to Acts 2:42 (Four-fold Order)

- Gathering - Word - Table - Sending

Planning Worship Through a Prayer Movement

- Adoration - Confession - Thanksgiving - Supplication

APPENDIX C - (edit)

Streams of song An overview of congregational song in the twenty-first century

By Michael Hawn

Research and experience of singing in a wide variety of Christian traditions indicates seven streams of song, drawing on seven sources of piety, each with its own identity while overlapping in some cases with others in varying degrees

Stream One—Roman Catholic Liturgical Renewal—reflects directly the reforms of Vatican II and the outpouring of song for the assembly that came and continues to come from this historic council. Virtually no hymnal is untouched by at least some congregational songs from this stream. At the center of this stream are songs for the sacraments, music for the lectionary, compositions for the Christian year, responsorial psalms and ritual music. Because of the breadth of the Catholic Church, these songs come to us from various parts of the world, but especially from Spanish-speaking locations as well as Euro-North American English speakers.

Stream Two—Classic Contemporary Protestant Hymnody—is a swelling stream originating in the “hymnic explosion” of Great Britain in the 1960s and 1970s and joined by rivers in other English-speaking countries, especially Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. While quite varied, the center of this stream includes paraphrases of scripture including fresh metrical paraphrases of the Psalms, hymns for the Christian year and sacraments, prophetic hymns on justice themes such as inclusion, peace and ecology, hymns on ministry, and, in some sections of the stream, a strong interest in inclusive language.

Stream Three—The African American Stream—finds a voice in virtually all confessional traditions. Here one will find a variety of musical expressions from spirituals and hymns to various styles of gospel music. This stream offers us songs born in the crucible of struggle, reflecting scripture and, often, expressing faith in the first-person. Since the middle of the 20th century, virtually all hymnals include songs from this stream, even in predominantly

Anglo traditions. Songs from this stream are seen by many as a major, even unique, contribution from the United States to the larger church.

Stream Four—Gospel and Revival Songs—is perhaps on the wane as a separate stream. It appears to be merging with others, especially with Streams Three and Six. These songs of praise, personal salvation and experience, and a triumphal faith continue, however, to find their way into a remarkable number of hymnals, even in some traditions where they have not been a dominant voice.

Stream Five—Folk Hymnody—draws from several sources of piety and has always been a part of the church's song. This stream experienced a revival in the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-Vietnam era of the 1960s, spreading into folk masses and continuing as an idiom in its own right today. The use of the acoustic guitar lends informality to songs of praise and protest as well as narrative ballads that are immediately accessible to groups.

Stream Six—Pentecostal Song—often called "Praise and Worship" or "Contemporary Christian Music" finds its piety source in early 20th century American Pentecostal traditions such as the Azusa Street Revival (1906), but has expanded into a world-wide expression of Christianity in many languages. Its electric sounds have influenced other streams, especially Stream Three, and those devoted to this stream have their spiritual roots in a wide variety of confessional traditions. These songs, often rooted in scriptural fragments, range from ecstatic praise to intense prayer, and often address God directly in the second person and petition Christ in the first person.

Stream Seven—Ecumenical and Global Stream—attempts to bring into focus the contributions of two-thirds of the world's Christians, especially those that come from Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. European addendum contributions come from two well-known ecumenical communities, Taizé and Iona, to global song. A direct result of the reforms of Vatican II and the pronouncement to "respect... and foster...the genius and talents of the various races and peoples,"[i] this stream includes songs around the world from many confessional traditions that have been included in North American hymnals.

APPENDIX A:

Ten Core Convictions of Christian Worship (CICW)

<https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/ten-core-convictions/>

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, which is based at Calvin College and funded by the Lilly Endowment, identified ten core principles and practices to present as our central convictions about vital Christian worship. These ten core convictions are not innovations. They are timeless truths from Scripture and the rich history of Christian worship. This attempt to reiterate and reinforce the importance of these ten core convictions will lead, we pray, to more fruitful conversations about the meaning and practice of Christian worship.

Christian worship is immeasurably enriched by:

1. A vivid awareness of the beauty, majesty, mystery, and holiness of the triune God

Worship cultivates our knowledge and imagination about who God is and what God has done. Worship gives us a profound awareness of the glory, beauty, and holiness of God. Each element of worship can be understood through a Trinitarian framework. Worship renewal is best sustained by attention to the triune God we worship. (Psalm 27:4; Psalm 63:2)

2. The full, conscious, active participation of all worshipers, as a fully intergenerational community

Worship is not just what ministers, musicians, and other leaders do; it is what all worshipers “do”—through the work of the Spirit in worship. In vital worship, all worshipers are involved in the actions, words, and meaning of worship. God’s covenant promises endure “from generation to generation.” Worship that arises out of an intentionally intergenerational community, in which people of all ages are welcomed as full participants, and whose participation enriches each other, reflects that worship breaks down barriers of age. (Nehemiah 8:1,6,7,8,12; Psalm 148:12-13)

3. Deep engagement with scripture

The Bible is the source of our knowledge of God and of the world’s redemption in Christ. Worship should include prominent readings of Scripture, and engage worshipers through

intentional reading practices, art, and music. It should present and depict God's being, character, and actions in ways that are consistent with scriptural teaching. It should follow biblical commands about worship practices, and it should heed scriptural warnings about false and improper worship. In particular, Christian worship should be deeply connected to its ancient roots in psalmody. (Colossians 3:16)

4. Joyful and solemn celebrations of baptism and the Lord's Supper

The sacraments are physical signs of God's nourishing action in creation through the Holy Spirit. In baptism God puts his covenant mark on his children, adopts them into the church, and calls them to a lifetime of dying and rising with Christ. In the Lord's Supper, God physically and spiritually feeds his people. These celebrations are not just ceremonies, but gifts of grace and signs of God's ongoing work. (Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

5. An open and discerning approach to culture

Worship should strike a healthy balance among four approaches or dimensions to its cultural context: worship is transcultural (some elements of worship are beyond culture), contextual (worship reflects the culture in which it is offered), cross-cultural (worship breaks barriers of culture through worship), and counter-cultural (worship resists the idolatries of its cultural context. (See the Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture for more here!)) (Romans 12:2; Matthew 5:13; Revelations 5:9)

6. Disciplined creativity in the arts

Worship is enriched by artistic creativity in many genres and media, not as ends to themselves or as open-ended individual inspirations, but all disciplined by the nature of worship as a prophetic and priestly activity. Exodus 35:30-35)

7. Collaboration with all other congregational ministries

Congregational worship is mutually enriching to the full range of congregational ministries, including pastoral care, education, spiritual formation, and witness. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

8. Warm, Christ-centered hospitality for all people

A central feature of worship is that it breaks down barriers to welcome all worshipers, including persons with disabilities, those from other cultures, both seekers and lifelong Christians, and others. (Romans 12:13)

9. Intentional integration between worship and all of life

Worship fosters natural and dynamic connections between worship and life, so that the worship life of Christian congregations both reflects and shapes lives of grateful obedience, deeply engages with the needs of the world, including such specific areas as restorative justice, care for the earth, and many other areas. (Romans 12:1)

10. Collaborative planning and evaluation

Worship involves a collaborative process for planning and evaluating services in the context of an adaptive approach to overall congregational leadership. (Acts 20:28)

APPENDIX [C]

THIRTY HYMNS TO LEARN BEFORE YOU DIE

<https://hymnary.org/browse/popular>

- 1 Come Thou Fount
- 2 Be Thou My Vision
- 3 All Creatures of Our God and King
- 4 Holy, Holy, Holy
- 5 Before the Throne of God Above
(modern classic)
- 6 In Christ Alone (modern classic)
- 7 Crown Him with Many Crowns
- 8 How Firm a Foundation
- 9 How Great Thou Art
- 10 Nothing But the Blood of Jesus
- 11 O Worship the King
- 12 Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven
- 13 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty
- 14 Man of Sorrows
- 15 O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing
- 16 Come Ye Sinners (RESTORATION)
- 17 What Wondrous Love Is This
- 18 All Hail the Power of Jesus Name
- 19 Joy to the World (Psalm 98) -
(not originally a xmas song)

- 20 Christ the Lord is Risen Today
- 21 A Mighty Fortress
- 22 The Church's One Foundation
- 23 My Hope is Built (The Solid Rock)
- 24 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
- 25 Of the Father's Love Begotten
- 26 It is Well
- 27 And Can it Be
- 28 Rock of Ages
- 29 Amazing Grace
- 30 Take My Life and Let it Be

APPENDIX F

FIVE 'PRACTICES' FOR WORSHIP *by Bifrost Arts Worship*

There are five key practices that make up our worship. How can we learn and embody these practices so that our worship gives God glory and in turn is meaningful, formative, and beneficial for both ourselves and the whole worshipping community.

WORD PRACTICES

Our worship should cultivate in us a deep knowledge and love of the Scriptures. This means that worship should be focused around the Bible, messages should be expository, and our songs should put God's words into the mouths of his people.

Illustration - Psalm 119, Hebrews 4:12,

Discussion Questions:

How do we make time in our worship service for the reading of God's Word? Do we spend time reading, hearing, and exploring the whole depth and breadth of scriptures? Exploring the various genre's and movements? Are the scriptures clearly present in our prayers and song lyrics?

Exercises:

- List of the genre's of scripture. Suggest various approaches for best communicating each one. (music, preaching, dance, art, etc).
- Pick a song for each group - then agree on a scripture that best reflects or embodies that song.
- Design a movement or a gesture for each genre. Share.
- Lectio Continua - one approach for reading and reflecting on scripture

PRAYER PRACTICES

Our worship should include prayers of all kinds. This includes verbal prayers as well as meditative and contemplative prayers. And the prayers should reflect the whole range of emotions that are offered in the Psalms. A common view of prayer is that it is a laundry list of needs that we bring to God. But if we look at the Psalms we see prayers of lament, doubt, joy, anger, praise, and confession as well as petition. Ambrose of Milan,

a church leader in the time of the gladiators, called the Psalms "God's gymnasium of prayer." In other words - the psalms call us to exercises of prayer that may be hard, unfamiliar, or difficult!

Discussion Questions

Is prayer a filler in our worship service for transitioning us between events or is it a way for us to bring the whole range of our emotions and experiences before the Lord?

Exercise:

Pick a psalm of lament and read it (130) Now try to write your own prayer of lament. Share it with your group.

Collect - learn the structure and write a collect.

PRAISE PRACTICES

Our worship should cultivate in us the practice of praising God for who he is and what he has done. This means that our services should include prayers of praise to God, corporate praise music, and testimonies of God's work in our lives.

Illustration - Consider the story of Job. He was faithful to God and God blessed him. But then God took the blessings from him and gave him trials of many kinds. Job's wife told him that it made sense for him to praise God in good times, but now he should curse God. Job responded, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him." (Job 13:15) We learn from Job that praising God doesn't always flow from an expressive emotional experience for good that God has done in our lives, but that it is also a discipline we need to cultivate.

Discussion Questions

Does our worship service proclaim praises for God's character? Does it also bear witness to the work he has done in our lives? How can we expand the sense of praise in our lives? What do the Psalms teach us about how to praise God? Adoration, Thanksgiving, etc.

Exercise:

List 10 things about God that would cause us to praise him.

List 5 things individually that lead you to praise

ACTION PRACTICES

The Bible connects our worship to actions of love and justice. So our worship should cultivate opportunities to show compassion to the poor and needy among us. This includes giving our money away to be used by God for these purposes as well as praying for the needs of the poor, the orphans, the widows, the vulnerable, the sick, and the lonely.

Illustration

In Isaiah 1:15-17, God refused to receive his people's worship because their hands are full of blood. He said he would bring judgment on them unless they cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. James 1:27 reads, Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. There is a consistent message in the Bible that our worship is tied to our actions, especially toward the needy, and that we neglect this at our peril.

Discussion Questions

Does it seem foreign, unfamiliar, or just wrong that God wouldn't except our worship because of injustice in our lives? Even this side of the cross how should our worship pursue justice and care for the least of these?

Exercises

Ask God to open your eyes to the needy. Commit your lives, your resources, and your communities to the service of those suffering injustices.

SACRAMENT PRACTICES

The sacraments are visible signs of inward grace. And they provide opportunities to participate with our bodies in worship. The practices of baptism and communion in particular are instructive and participatory, and provide predictable, beautiful, and familiar structure to our worship and to our year. Whether our church takes communion and baptizes weekly, monthly, or yearly, the sacraments should be part of our worship.

Illustration

In Matthew 28:19 and 20, Jesus tells his disciples to make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. He also gave his disciples at the Last Supper his body and blood and instructed them to do this in remembrance of me. (Luke 22:19) Jesus gave us sacramental worship. He did not only see our minds and emotions as needing to come under his lordship, but also our bodies

Discussion Questions:

Are there ways that our church can incorporate the beauty of communion and baptism by talking about them or participating in them?

Exercises:

Remembering Our baptism (bowl of water) - No matter when you were baptized God calls us to live a life where we remember and celebrate our baptism - our entrance into the life of Christ and the church. How can we live out the power of our baptisms every time we worship? (write a short prayer to recite together)

God, when you brought me into your family through baptism - you made me a part of the eternal relationship you have with Son and Spirit. Through baptism you brought me into your covenant - where you promise to always care for me, protect me, and walk with me. Help me to remember and celebrate my baptism today and remind me that my baptism makes me a part of your world-wide family in Jesus Christ

