

EASTERN REGION



*Ephesians 4:12*  
*Leadership Series*

# **Worship and the Church Today**

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**G**od anoints men and women to lead His people into worship. Misconceptions about how to lead adoption of poor leadership models sometimes cause confusion or division in the church. Then, instead of worship uniting and lifting people individually and corporately, worship is a source of strife. The following Q&A is dedicated to assisting the local church worship leader better understand the role and ministry of leading worship. The personal pronoun, “he,” is used in a gender-neutral sense. God uses both men and women in worship and we make no gender distinction.

## ***Why Do We Worship?***

*“Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs”* Psalm 100:2. The first worship audience is God. Worship is dedicated to Him. It is our desire to glorify and bless the Lord with our worship. Worship is not first about us; it is about Him. Worship in the church is a corporate endeavor involving a congregation with individual backgrounds, personalities, and preferences. Worship should open hearts to the moving of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the Word.

## ***Who is the Worship Leader?***

The worship leader leads instead of directs. A choir director directs. A quarterback directs. A CEO directs. But, a worship leader is first and foremost a worshipper who invites, rather than commands, people to travel with him into the presence of God. The worship leader cannot lead or push people where he does not first go, nor berate or lecture people into worship. His role is not to merely timidly placate or to entertain the people. He is a vessel through whom the power of the Holy Spirit must flow. But, this vessel of God’s power must also be ever mindful that, just as the Holy Spirit is gentle as a dove, even so, the worship leader must reflect that sweetness of the Spirit. A worship leader is like an ambassador, bringing God and His people together. He is like an usher, helping people to find their place. His authority or power is in the anointing of God and in a spirit that beckons others to join him in the delight of experiencing God. The deepest and most humbling sense of fulfillment for a worship leader should be the joy of knowing that the Lord was blessed and people were touched by the Holy Spirit, to the extent that the worship leader almost seemed invisible--John 3:30 *“He must become greater; I must become less.”*

## ***What is the Place of Worship in a Service?***

Worship is essential whenever the people of God gather. Worship is offered unto the Lord and prepares the soil of the heart for the planting of the Word. Worship is foundational but does not supplant the preaching of the Word. Worship is preparatory to the preaching of the Word. A prayerfully planned service, always open to the spontaneity of the Spirit, has a flow that begins with focusing the minds, hearts, and spirits of otherwise distracted people. Worship offers ministry to hurts and an outlet for what the inner person needs and desires to release in praise. The worship leader must always see his role as part of a cast, never supplanting the pastor, always in support of the pastor. The worship leader is not called to preach. Words of encouragement and loving exhortation that bridge and invite people to transition in worship are appropriate, but sermons are not. When hearts have been moved through worship and opened to the Holy Spirit the stage is set for the Spirit to have freedom to move as He will and for the Word to take root.

## ***What is the Importance of Planning to Worship?***

The worship leader must be in prayerful preparation well in advance of a worship service. He must have a clear sense in his heart about the flow of the service, about coordinating with the pastor toward any goal or theme. He owes it to those who assist with worship to provide them with plenty of advance opportunity to personally prepare. He recognizes that some people need additional time to feel prepared and honors that. The more people involved in the worship team ministry, the more preparation is needed to coordinate and blend their efforts. Time for preparation and a commitment to excellence is glorifying to the Lord. Worship, instead of being a managed production, is lovingly planned and led with sensitivity to the direction of the Holy Spirit. Preparation means that everything should be ready well before the service begins. Preparation includes having overhead transparencies in proper order in advance, with the person responsible for transitioning overheads prepared to flow with worship. It means the sound system is ready, balanced, and people in place. As people enter the sanctuary, they should be greeted by pre-worship music that prepares them for worship, not the sight of worship personnel scrambling around at the last minute to throw something together. *Preparation indicates how important we believe worship is.* The worship leader also realizes that, even with careful preparation, he does not own or control worship. There must never be a question about ownership; the worship leader is a steward of worship, in submission to the pastor's leadership, never an owner of worship. Worship is dedicated to the Lord with ongoing freedom for the Holy Spirit to move in a direction that is different than planned. When the Spirit does move the service in a different direction it does not mean the planning was flawed. It means the Spirit has determined that circumstances, the hearts of the people, or for whatever other reason He concludes, now is the time to change.

## ***What is the Difference between Praise and Worship?***

Praise is to worship like a smiling handshake is to a warm embrace. There is nothing wrong with a smiling handshake, and it sure beats a vacant stare! But, as Spirit-filled people we desire what God desires, intimacy of relationship. How wonderful it is to sing praises about the Lord to one another. We are deepened in our faith and understanding about who God is. One of the powerful benefits of many of the traditional hymns is that we are encouraged to hold fast to that which we know is true. Good and solid theology is included in the praise classics. Praise is an important means of building ourselves up in the faith and should not be neglected. *However, we don't want to leave it at that.* We want to experience the Lord, to know Him, His presence, and His touch. Worship moves beyond a smiling handshake to a loving recognition and embrace of the Lord. Worship ushers us into His presence and His warm embrace in a way like people in close relationship understand. A discerning worship leader realizes this and skillfully invites people to that deeper level of relationship with the Lord, where not only they feel like embracing Him, *the Spirit Himself is also drawn* into a Sovereign embrace of the people, both individually and corporately. A worship leader is not content with a worship service that only incorporates praise, deepens faith, and encourages the people. A worship leader's passion must be to bring the people and God into a mutual, warm, and loving embrace. Worship transforms a sanctuary into the dwelling place of God. You will notice that often it is not the lofty or theologically profound musical selections that draw people into worship. Rather, it is often those selections that are really quite simple but importantly provide a vehicle for expression from the heart and spirit. It is what the Lord desires most in worship. True worship is an expression and deepening of relationship. That is why the worship leader asks for and is sensitive to the direction of the Holy Spirit to find those musical outlets of worship that are tuned to the Spirit's frequency, to God's heart. Worship is also a call to spiritual battle, a declaration and appropriation of the power of God to break yokes of bondage and to set people free. God does not intend for us to be but self-satisfied recipients of His blessings. We are to engage the enemy and "Blow the trumpets of Zion" in proclaiming and claiming victory. Worship can be an incredibly powerful vehicle for the release of God's transforming power and for manifestations of His Spirit. The pastor and worship leader must lean forward with desire and reach out with faith to tap that power.

## ***Is Quality Important in Worship?***

Worship is not performance. Who has not been blessed by a person worshipping the Lord with less than recording caliber intonation, but with a spirit that melts hearts? However, it is also a mistake to assume that *choosing* to give less than our best to the Lord is pleasing to Him. The issue is not quality of music, voice, instrumentation, sound system, etc. as demonstrated elsewhere. What is important is to give the best of what we have to offer to him, and to endeavor to upgrade what our best is. Giving less than the best of our talent unto the Lord is sometimes twisted into an indication of spirituality, a totally false and lazy misconception. Are musical instruments in tune? Have vocalists diligently worked to learn melodies and harmonies? Is the P.A. system

balanced ahead of time? When was the last time you spell-checked and corrected your transparencies? Are they easy to read? Does their quality project a commitment to excellence or minimum effort? When was the last time you cleaned dust from the top and inside of the overhead projector's lens? Not only is the Lord blessed by our best, more people can be drawn into the Lord's presence when the quality of what we offer to Him pleases, instead of offends, the ear and eye. Even if you believe that people are too quality conscious, ignore the reality at your peril. Do you want to reach people who are not now a comfortable part of your church family? Remove the negatives, whatever detracts from ministry, and give your best to the Lord.

### ***To Whom is the Worship Leader Accountable?***

The pastor is responsible before God for a church service. Even though he may not actually lead worship, he is the head worshipper. He has prayed and sought God about the direction of a service and will instruct the worship leader accordingly. The pastor always reserves the right to change the direction of a service, including re-directing the flow of worship. The worship leader, as part of a supporting cast, should at no time presume authority without the assurance of blessing by the pastor. Even if the worship leader believes he hears the voice of the Spirit leading in one direction and the pastor moves in another, the worship leader is accountable to submit to the pastor, and the pastor is accountable before God for his leadership. Here are two additional integrity checkpoints regarding the worship leader's accountability:

#### **Integrity Checkpoint #1**

Do you, as the worship leader, participate and enter into all other aspects of the service, in addition to the part that you lead? A conscientious worship leader invests much spiritual, emotional, and physical energy into leading worship. It is sometimes tempting, upon concluding the leading of worship, for the worship leader to exit the sanctuary and "take a break" around the water fountain, in the hallways, the entry area, etc. Some worship leaders delay or do not even reenter the sanctuary for the preaching of the Word. When he does that the worship leader betrays everything that he has stood for and proclaimed while leading worship. It allows people to easily conclude that worship was but performance and that the worship leader's attitude is one of, "Now that my time is done, I am off duty." People are not ignorant and can be quite discerning about this key test of leadership integrity. The worship leader is part of a team and, though he may be tired or drained from leading worship, his responsibility is to remain in the sanctuary, demonstrating that he is also part of the congregation and as is as supportive of the rest of the service as he desires people to be while he is leading. He is there to receive truth and ministry from the Word. You must understand that your leadership does not conclude with the worship portion of the service.

#### **Integrity Checkpoint #2**

Do you enter into worship when someone else is leading? Or, do you spend that time analyzing and critiquing the worship leader? Can you receive another person's worship leadership? Do you enter in under another worship leader in

the same way you want people to enter in when you lead? This is a definite test of integrity, and of ego.

### ***What about Differences concerning Contemporary Worship and Hymns?***

The worship leader must learn to be sensitive to the makeup and needs of the congregation, discovering what draws and invites people into worship. You always start with where people are. One of the elements that brought on the Reformation was that the people were far removed from God. Services were in Latin, controlled and led exclusively by priests. The people had no personal connection with God. Even so today, the worship leader must take care that he does not speak “Latin,” a foreign music language or style to the congregation. No two congregations are alike. What is “hot” worship for one congregation will leave another cold, and vice versa. Some churches contain a considerable number of people with deep spiritual and church roots. They do not want to forsake worship that has blessed and ushered them into the presence of God. Other churches have a higher proportion of people without traditional church roots. They are starting fresh and do not relate as well to styles that just remind them of a bygone era. The worship mix for each church will be different from the other. A worship leader cannot attend an inspiring worship seminar or service in another church and return home to merely clone the same in his church. Leading worship is a major responsibility, so key to a church service and what takes place after worship. It can seem like walking a tightrope because worship preferences vary so widely. Traditionalists must be helped to understand that the church does not exist to merely please or bless them, that the church is always one generation removed from extinction. An outsider can quickly identify those churches where worship is understood to exist only for the pleasure of long-standing members. Worship has become a living memorial to former days—often thirty to forty years ago—and fossilized, with life and meaning limited to an ever-shrinking number of people. On the other hand, people who love the contemporary must be helped to value the heritage and depth of meaning that traditional worship selections hold for others. The worship leader can neither allow a congregation to remain frozen in time, failing to embrace freshness, nor disrespect the heritage and meaning of the worship experiences of the people. *Never cease to move the people forward*, but with sensitivity to the pace of change that they can accept. But, while pursuing freshness, do not disconnect the people from or deny their heritage of worship. Pastor, do not leave the worship leader to face the waves of reaction to worship change alone. Change must be under your leadership and with your visible blessing.

### ***When Does Worship Begin?***

This is not a trick question. Individually, believers ought to be worshipping the Lord throughout the day, not just during a corporate worship service. But, what about when the people of God gather together for worship? If a worship service begins at, say 10:30 a.m., does worship begin at 10:30 a.m.? No, or at least it should not begin then. First, worship needs to have begun in the hearts and spirits of the worship leader and

worship team well in advance of the beginning of the service. The worship leader and worship team should gather in advance for prayer and to prepare their hearts. By definition, a leader must be ahead of the people so that they can follow. So, a worship leader must be already in worship before asking the people to follow. Secondly, remember that people often come unprepared to worship. As stated earlier, they may be distracted and not particularly ready to worship. So, pre-worship preparation of the people is important. It is a mistake to have a worship team suddenly appear at 10:30 a.m. and abruptly launch into worship (“We’re on!”), expecting people to immediately enter in. Rather, pre-worship music should begin in advance of the service, preparing the atmosphere and readiness of the people for worship. There is very little time available to accomplish what needs to happen in a service. The earlier in the service that people become focused and ready to enter in the more fruitful it can be. *Prepare the people for worship.*

### ***What About People who are there but do not Worship?***

People come to church in various conditions of heart and spirit, with varying expectations or lack of expectations. Many arrive having felt tired or beat up from the week that just ended. They have put up with frustration, abuse, discouragement, and any number of other negative experiences. In many cases, they endure working with obnoxious people, including supervisors. They come into the sanctuary viewing it truly as a sanctuary, a place of refreshing refuge from the world, not to be bossed, ordered, or pounded on by someone else. They need ministry. Not all enter the sanctuary with the same level of spiritual maturity. Some are babies in the Lord, no matter how long they have known Him. Many do not understand and have not accepted a responsibility for leading themselves into the Lord’s presence; they count on a church worship service to help them. They are dependent on the church and part of the church’s mission is to disciple and grow them so that their dependency is in Christ. The worship leader must also never forget that people respond individually to the presence of the Holy Spirit. Some people are outwardly demonstrative and their emotions are quick in response. Their hands are the first to reach toward Heaven, tears may readily flow, and they may freely speak forth praises in tongues. Outwardly responsive worshippers are a delight to the worship leader because they are like the equivalent of an “amen” encouragement to a preacher. Thank God for them while remembering that other people, who may appear stoic and less demonstrative, can also be worshipping in spirit and truth. It is important to not judge worship participation solely on exterior measurements. There must be a freedom to worship without “Simon says” regimentation. And, a discerning worship leader will also recognize that many, and probably most, of the people do not catch the presence of the Spirit as quickly as the worship leader. Remember that they have not focused their hearts and spirits for a service like the worship leader, who has paid the price of preparation in heart and spirit. It takes time for most people to tune their hearts away from distraction and focus on worship. That is why they need leadership, someone who has already climbed part way up the mountain and now reaches down to offer a loving hand to draw and lift them up as well.

## ***What if the Worship Leader feels anointed to exhort those who are not entering into Worship?***

The worship leader must not divide the congregation between those who do or do not enter into worship, though both groups will be in attendance. Do not draw attention to their differences. Instead, invite all to move from where they are, whether intimacy with God or shallow acquaintance, into a closer worshipping relationship with the Lord. Comments such as, “If you could only feel the anointing like we feel it up here...” only divide. Worshippers, and those we hope will become worshippers, have to trust their leader. It is possible to mistake the powerful presence and anointing of the Holy Spirit as unction to rebuke. It is not the worship leader’s place to rebuke the people. It can be understandably frustrating to a worship leader when he senses that a number of people are merely physically present but are not worshipping. But, if the people sense that the worship leader looks down on them with irritation and, instead of offering a helping hand, points an accusatory finger for their being so low on a scale of worship, they will not follow. It may feel good to the worship leader at the moment to “let it rip,” while satisfying a sense of righteous indignation. However, instead of leading people up the mountain, the worship leader will know the frustration of people setting their jaws and not accepting his leadership. If the worship leader condemns or chastises people for not entering into worship as he desires, people will be driven from worship. True leadership does not come by appointment, position, or function alone. Leadership is also confirmed as it is recognized and affirmed by people who walk in the Spirit. *A worship leader’s declarations of love for God will be validated in the eyes of the people by the extent to which they sense the worship leader’s love and care for them.*

## ***Why Does the Worship Leader Lead?***

Why does a pastor serve as pastor? It has to do with a call. God does not call those who are already perfectly prepared for leadership. He calls those whose hearts He trusts, people He has equipped and enable for the task (though we may not always be convinced at the beginning), and people who are thrilled by the prospect of serving the Master. Leaders who “deliver” in walking out a call to serve are those who do so with teachable and submitted spirits, a hunger to grow, and a willingness to allow the Spirit to change and transform them into what the Lord desires. If a worship leader is driven by the exhilaration of being in front of people his leadership will not be marked by the fruitfulness that could result. If a worship leader is afraid to walk in the authority of the Spirit his effectiveness will be limited. But, when a worship leader determines, because he has been called and anointed by the Holy Spirit, to walk not in fear but in God’s power and love, there is no limit to what could happen.

Not many people have opportunity to lead worship. It is a distinct blessing and tremendous responsibility. Perhaps one of the greatest tests, and marks, of a quality worship leader is what happens in his heart when he knows God has used him to lead people into God’s presence. That mark is humility. When you discover that when the

Lord uses you in a new or growing dimension, you are also humbled as never before, then there is more that He will do in and through you. There is no greater or more humbling joy than to know God has seen fit to use you for His glory. Seek His face. Pursue intimate relationship with Him so that you can, with His anointing, invite and lead others to also draw closer to Him.