

**Worship Matters Video Intensive with Bob Kauflin**  
**Session 2: The Important Things: Skill and Life**  
**(From Chapters 4-5 of *Worship Matters*)<sup>1</sup>**  
**Transcript**

Welcome to the second video in the Worship Matters Video Intensive. In our first session, we looked at Part 1 of The Important Things: our heart and our mind. In this session we're going to look at our skill and our life.

It's possible, and pretty common actually, to love God with all our hearts and know him well through his Word, and be ineffective in leading others to engage meaningfully with God when we gather together on Sundays. In other words, you can be a really godly person and a terrible leader. And usually the reason for that is skill.

**I. The Missing Ingredient: Skill**

Skill isn't a bad word. It's the ability to do something well, usually as a result of practice. There's no contradiction between being skilled at what you do and having an authentic, genuine, passion for God. God is actually for skill.

We read in Exodus 36:1 that God chose men with "skill and intelligence" to work on the tabernacle. 1 Chronicles 15:22, Kenaniah led the singing because "he was skillful at it" (NIV) whereas the ESV says "He understood it." David encourages us in Psalm 33:3 to "play skillfully on the strings."

Now, we need to be reminded that God doesn't need our skills to do his work. He changes hearts even when we're unprepared, when we sing out of tune, and when we make mistakes. But the normal way God works is through those who are prepared and those who have practiced.

**II. Things to Remember About Skill**

Now, in *Worship Matters*, I talk about 5 things that are important to remember about skill. I'm just going to cover 3 of them here.

**A. Skill is a gift from God for his glory.**

First, skill is a gift from God for his glory. The world is filled with musicians passionately pursuing a name for themselves. Artists shamelessly promote themselves hourly through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube and whatever other social media things that are going to be developed in the future. Their not-so-subtle message is: "I'm great! Look at me! Look how good I am at what I do! I think I'm great! You should think so too!" But God brings us back to reality with this question in 2 Corinthians 4:7:

*"What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" - 1 Corinthians 4:7<sup>2</sup>*

My good friend C.J. Mahaney once said in a sermon,

*“All gifts from God are intended to direct our attention to God and create fresh affection for God.” - C.J. Mahaney<sup>3</sup>*

The very best we can be as leaders is pointers and signposts. If you're trying to get somewhere and you see a signpost telling you where to go, you don't stop at the signpost and just look at it for a half an hour going, “Wow. That's a beautiful signpost. That is amazing. I love that signpost. Look at how artistically it's done. Look how aesthetically pleasing it is.” No! You look at where the signpost is pointing and then you head off in the direction it's going. Well that's what we are when we stand in front of people leading them to worship God in Jesus Christ for who he is. We're signposts. It's the best we can be. That's the goal of our leading. Now people may come up to us afterwards and say how much they appreciated our voice, our playing, our fills, or our technical proficiency, but that's not why we lead. Skill is a gift from God for his glory.

B. Skill doesn't make us or our worship more acceptable to God.

Here's another thing to remember about skill: skill doesn't make us or our worship more acceptable to God.

Is the worship of Chris Tomlin more acceptable to God than your local church? Is the worship of the church down the street with 10,000 members on a Sunday morning more acceptable to God than the worship of your church? No. Well, why not? Because it's accepted on the same basis: the finished work of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:5 says that we offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Now, there are reasons for improving our chord knowledge, knowing our scales, memorizing music, taking lessons, and aiming for smooth transitions, but making what we do acceptable to God is not one of them. Jesus alone makes us—and our worship—acceptable to God.

C. Skill grows through investment.

Here's a third thing to remember about skill: skill grows through investment. People sometimes come up to me and say, “Boy, I wish I could play the piano like you do.” I say, “Well, you can! All you need to do is practice 4 hours a day, every day, for 4 years, and I think you could probably play the piano like I do. Because that's what I did when I went to college, I practiced four hours a day every day on average. I was doing things like this.

[ ♪ Dirge-like piano exercise ♪ ]

And it went on and on like that. What was I doing? I was investing time and effort and energy so that I become better. Many of us want the fruit of practice without actually having to practice. Our jaws drop at the results of

practice but we ignore what it took to get there. Getting better doesn't happen by merely thinking about it, wanting it, or hoping for it. We actually have to invest time, energy, thought; we have to change our habits – or we won't change.

I have a friend in Nashville who knows a country songwriter who averages about one hit a year. I said, "How does he do that?" He said, "Well, he writes and records 2 songs every week. And out of those hundred songs that he writes and records through the year, one of them rises to become a country hit."

I was talking with my friend Keith Getty about the song "In Christ Alone." I said, "Keith, how many melodies were you writing a day when you wrote the melody for In Christ Alone?" And his answer surprised me: 10 melodies a day. 10 melodies a day! I'm not sure I write 10 melodies a year! Here he was writing 10 melodies a day, one of them turned out to be a song that has blessed hundreds of thousands of Christians throughout the world. That's the result of investment.

Now, you don't have to practice 4 hours a day. You might only have 15 minutes a day, or an hour a week. But if you do *something* 15 minutes a day, 5 days a week, that will total up to 65 hours a year. How much better could you be at what you do if you invested 65 hours in it? Who knows? Who knows what God might do with your 5 loaves and 2 fish? We'll never know unless we invest the time.

### III. What Skill Helps Us Do

- A. Skill helps us focus on the most important things.

Important things like the lyrics we're singing, like how the Spirit might want lead in a particular moment, like engaging with the congregation more than we're thinking about what we're playing.

- B. Skill helps us serve people more effectively.

We can be less distracted trying to play chords or remember words. Our faces can look radiant as we look to the Lord, rather than looking confused as we're trying to remember what to play next. We can lead from a place of peace rather than anxiety.

- C. Skill helps us serve people more broadly.

When I call someone to work on my house to do some job, I notice they have 3 things I don't have: they have knowledge, experience, and tools. Oh, the tools! Sometimes someone pulls something out of their truck and I go, "Oh! If I had that, I could've done this myself!" But the point is, I don't

have that. *He* has that and he's able to get the job done. The more tools we have, the more we can do. For a musician, tools include things like the ability to read notes if you can't, or the ability to read chord charts if you can't do that. It means learning to play another instrument, learning a new software program, learning about new guitar pedals, getting experience in different kinds of music. It might mean picking up the ability to arrange or growing in your knowledge of songs. The point is, the more tools you have, the more ways God can use you to serve his people for his glory.

#### IV. Skills to Develop

##### A. Leadership

A leader sees a situation as it is, how it needs to change, and does something to bring that change about. Leaders see themselves as tools that God can use to display his character and truth.

Now you might be thinking, "But I'm not a leader." If you're in front of people on Sunday morning, no matter what your role is, you're leading in some way. Part of growing in the skill of leadership is simply realizing that God wants to use us to make a difference for his glory, whether that means leading in planning, in caring for others, in communicating; it also involves making decisions. Sometime we have to say "yes" to things, and "no" to others. That's part of leadership.

Romans 12:8 says that the one who leads is to lead with zeal—not half-heartedly, not apathetically, not occasionally—but with zeal. We often fail to lead for fear of failing. We think we're just going to look silly, things aren't going to go well, that nothing will change, that we'll inevitably disappoint people. Well, that's true. If you're a leader, all those things might happen, but a leader continues to lead anyway by the grace of God because they're concerned about God's glory and they want to be used for God's glory because our goal is not to please people first and foremost, but to please God. As Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:4, "We speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts." That's why we want to grow as leaders.

##### B. Musicianship

In his wonderful book, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, Harold Best defines excellence as

*"the process of becoming better than I once was. I am not to become better than someone else is or even like someone else. Excelling is simply—and radically—the process of improving over yesterday."*<sup>4</sup>

I remember reading that section of that book with a band and one of the vocalists saying, "Wait a minute. Do you mean that I don't have to be as good as Vikki?" I smiled and said, "That's exactly right. You don't have to

be as good as Vikki." She said, "That's so freeing! I've been trying for so long to be as good as her and I don't have to be!" And I said, "No, you just need to be better than what you used to be." And it brought a freedom to her soul.

Wherever you're at musically, you can be better. There's so many opportunities we have now for learning: YouTube, college classes, private lessons, other members of your team, blogs, websites. You can improve a skill you already have or develop new ones. With technology changing as fast as it does, there are so many opportunities to grow in our understanding of technology and how it can be used to serve us as we seek to serve God's people.

I know one of the things I've had to adapt to over time is just the way I play songs. We sing a Sovereign Grace song called "Greater than We Can Imagine". And the chorus goes:

[♫ Sings with full and busy piano accompaniment]  
*Because you are greater than we can imagine  
You are too beautiful for us to fathom  
Oh, you are great and greatly to be praised*

That was in the '80s where that style kind of developed where you just play as many notes as you can. I mean, you've got 10 fingers, 88 keys...there are lots of possibilities.

Well, over the years, that kind of playing has really gone out of fashion most places. So, I've had to adapt what I play. So it's become more like:

[♫ Sings with sparse piano accompaniment]  
*Because you are greater than we can imagine  
You are too beautiful for us to fathom  
Oh, you are great and greatly to be praised*

I mean, I've got a whole band around me filling in all those gaps. I don't need to do all that stuff. So that's one of the ways I've sought to grow as a musician.

### C. Communication

Now typically, we musicians aren't very good public speakers. We tend to ramble, we sound incoherent, we're redundant, we're uninspiring. We think, "Well, everything I want to say comes out in my music. Besides, there are plenty of other people who can communicate. I don't need to do it."

While that may be true and there are some people who will never really grow as a communicator, I think that most of us can grow in our ability to express our thoughts more clearly, in a more compelling, and biblically faithful way. And if you're responsible to say things between the songs you lead, I want to really encourage you to work on this area. Too often,

musicians think, “Well, I’ll just fill in between the songs with whatever comes to mind.” I don’t think that really serves the church. I’ve found it helpful to reference a line from a song, make a contrast, use a Scripture, and then make an application. For instance, in the song, "All Creatures of Our God and King", there’s this line:

[♪ sings]  
*Let all things their creator bless  
And worship him in humbleness  
Oh, praise Him*

So, we might have just sung that song and afterwards, I might say something like this:

“We just sang the line, "Let all things their Creator bless / And worship him in humbleness." Worshiping anything but God is really an act of pride. We’re saying we get to choose our own God, but we don’t get to choose our own God. We read in Isaiah 45:22 (and I would pick up my Bible and read from Isaiah 45:22 because it’s always important to have our Bibles with us when we lead), ‘Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.’ Let’s turn again to the Lord again in humbleness, forsaking all other gods and acknowledging that He has the right to rule our lives.”

I’m just linking two songs together, taking something from that song, showing how it’s grounded in the Word of God, contrasting it to how we might normally think of God or think about our idols, and then encouraging us to pursue what’s true and what’s real.

Now, you might want to consider writing down in advance what you’re going to say. That helps with keeping it brief and connected. I’d also encourage you to memorize it, and not read it. Just the process of writing it out helps you think about things more clearly and communicate more effectively.

#### D. Administration

Like all skills, administration isn’t an end in itself. Its purpose is to glorify God by serving others—and how many times I thank God for the gift of administration! It includes areas like being prepared for rehearsals, contacting people in a timely way, being on time. These are little things that we may think don’t really matter, but they are actually such a means of encouraging those you serve with.

Programs like Planning Center Online (that’s what we use) can really help in this area. It can send out a batch of emails all at one time. Books I’ve found particularly helpful are:

- *Getting Things Done* by David Allen
- *What’s Best Next* by Matt Perman
- *Biblical Productivity* by C.J. Mahaney

## V. The Skill of Living a Life of Worship

With all the skills we've covered, there's one more I want to talk about, and no skill is more important than this: it's the skill of "doing all to the glory of God." Leading worship starts and ends with the way I live my life, not just what I do on stage, or in public. Our best worship is seen not in our songs, but in our lives. That's why Paul writes:

*"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."* - Romans 12:1-2

Now, Paul has just spent 11 chapters explaining, exalting, and exulting in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the fact that God provided His Son as the propitiation for our sins as the sacrifice which takes away his wrath and is the means by which we are reconciled to God and are no longer under condemnation.

So, what should our response to that unpacking of the gospel be? We should sing, pray, give, recite creeds, lift our hands. Yes, yes, yes, and yes. But most importantly, God wants us to present our bodies—everything about us—as an offering.

Now, we might not be aware of this, but Paul is using Old Testament language that the Jews had used for centuries to describe temple worship—words like, "sacrifices," "holy," "acceptable"—and he's applying them to all of life. Those who first read Paul's letter would have been shocked at what he was doing because it wasn't normal.

Jesus did something similar when he was talking to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. He said "the Father is seeking worshipers," not acts of worship, not feelings of worship, not moments of worship, but *worshipers*—something that encompasses all of life.

The worship we offer God can't be confined to what we do on Sundays. Our lives, our minds, and emotions are all meant to be a response to God's incredible mercy in Jesus Christ. In one sense worshiping God is easy. It's what God redeemed us to do—to worship him. But in another sense, worship isn't easy because it's a war. We are in a fight, a battle, a war for our souls, and the Bible tells us who our enemies are. Our enemies are the world, the flesh, and the devil. Here's how they seek to defeat us, and if we're not mindful of this, we will certainly be defeated.

### A. The World

This is what John says in his first letter,

*"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the*

*desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away*

*along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”*  
- 1 John 2:15–17

When John uses the term, "the world," he's not talking about our planet, he's not talking about people in general, or people who dress a certain way. "The world" defines a system of thought that is opposed to God in every respect and in every area, and he says we are to fight that world. We are not to love that world because that world will challenge our worldview. It will challenge what we value and how we think life works. It will seek to draw us with its evils and pornography. It will seek to allure us with its pleasures and sensuality: stuff, movies, sports, money, house, cars, computers—you name it. It doesn't matter what it is as long as it gets us away from Jesus Christ. John goes on later in his letter to say this

*“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”* - 1 John 5:4-5

And that's what we are proclaiming every time we gather as God's people: Jesus is the Son of God so we can have victory over the world.

## **B. The Flesh**

Another enemy is the flesh. The flesh is that inner hatred toward God and the gospel that remains even after our hearts have been made new. It will seek to fight, deceive, and weaken us until the day we see Jesus face to face. 1 Peter 2:11 says,

*“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”* - 1 Peter 2:11

That's indwelling sin. That's the flesh. It wages war against our souls. We can't overestimate the power, persuasiveness, deceptiveness, creativity, consistency, and danger of indwelling sin. It's subtle, it's surprising, and it's deadly. There's probably more sin in us than we're aware of. In fact, I'm sure there is, and the purpose of finding it and killing it is not to become navel gazers. It's so that we can see how glorious a Savior Jesus really is. And I've been helped immensely in this area by reading the works of John Owen. Now, John Owen was a Puritan and is not an easy read, but I've been immensely helped in seeing the enemy within me. There are various versions of his writings:

- *Indwelling Sin, The Mortification of Sin, and Of Temptation* by John Owen (*Complete Works, Vol. 6*)
- *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, published by Crossway
- *The Enemy Within* by Kris Lugaard



I've been encouraged by quotes like this:

*"Be killing sin or it will be killing you."* - John Owen<sup>5</sup>

In other words, there's no time of day, there's no moment of our lives that sin isn't actively working to draw us away from Jesus Christ.

Here's another one:

*"The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin."* - John Owen<sup>6</sup>

In other words, just because we're forgiven, doesn't mean we don't fight sin. The fact that we're forgiven means we *do* want to fight sin.

### C. **Satan**

*"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* - 1 Peter 5:8

Imagine you and your family went to your local zoo and as you walked in, someone told you, "The lion has escaped its enclosure and is running around the zoo!" What would your response be? "Hey, kids, let's go check it out."? I don't think so. You'd leave because you don't want to be eaten up by a lion.

That's what Peter says that Satan is doing, prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. And once we're saved, Satan will do everything he can to make us miserable, unfruitful, and dangerous.

Since he can't unsave us, he'll try to make us **miserable**. He'll seek to persuade us that the Christian life isn't it all it's cracked up to be. He'll tell us everyone else is having fun when we can't. He'll speak the lie that we're incredibly heroic in the way we're serving others, but nobody seems to notice.

He'll try to make us **unfruitful**. He'll try to limit any impact we have. He'll let us have exciting meetings as no one's lives are actually changing. In fact, that's a deception God's people have frequently fallen into, where the meetings are great but no one's actually looking more like Jesus from week to week.

Finally, Satan will seek to make us **dangerous**. He does this when our lives proclaim a different message than our songs proclaim on Sunday morning. People start to say, "Well, if they can live that way, then certainly we can," and that's dangerous. Brothers and sisters, we've been called to something much higher, much more glorious, much more soul-satisfying and Christ-exalting: living a life for the glory of God in the power of his Spirit.

Now, in these first two sessions we've looked at what God wants a worship leader to *be*. In the next session and the following sessions, we're going to turn to what God wants a worship leader to *do*.

## Session 2 Discussion Questions

1. Bob asks, "Is the worship of Chris Tomlin more acceptable to God than the worship of your local church?" What makes worship acceptable to God? What good things do not make worship "more acceptable" to God?
2. Discuss the role that skill should and should not play in the worship of God. What advantages spiritually does skill give us?
3. Out of the skills Bob lists to develop (leadership, musicianship, communication, administration), which area do you think you need to grow in the most? What are some practical ways you can do that? (Invite the perspective of trusted friends and leaders to help you answer this question.)
4. Bob says "worship is war." What competes for your worship when you're on stage? What competes for your worship off stage?
5. How is God by His Spirit helping you to combat the world, the flesh and the devil? Where have you seen growth in your life? Where have you seen growth in the other group members? Take some time to encourage each other by identifying evidences of God's grace working in one another.

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<sup>1</sup> *Worship Matters* by Bob Kauflin, © 2008 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, [www.crossway.org](http://www.crossway.org).

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<sup>3</sup> From a message called "More Desirable Than Spiritual Gifts," given at the Sovereign Grace Small Group Leaders Conference, 1998.

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