
WILL THE REAL WORSHIP LEADER PLEASE STAND UP?

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I. Introduction

A. Musical leadership roles in the church have changed dramatically in recent decades.

1. Change in degree of influence

“For many young people choosing a church, worship leaders have become a more important factor than preachers. Mediocre preaching may be tolerated, but an inept worship leader can sink things fast.” (Gordon MacDonald, *To Find a Worship Leader*, Leadership Journal, Spring 2002)

2. Change in pastor’s role as “gatekeeper”

Musicians have typically worked from a limited canon, a hymnal, usually only sung once, and approved by the pastor.

Now they can get songs from CD’s, radio, and the Internet without hindrance or involvement from others. Plus Nashville and CCM are eager to serve and influence the local worship leader.

For many churches, the “pastor as gatekeeper” mentality is non-existent when it comes to music.

B. I’ve had questions about my own role.

C. Our Goal: To understand and apply what Scripture says about who should lead corporate worship.

II. How Do We Define Worship?

A. Most narrow (perhaps most common) definition – the feeling I get at certain times when I’m singing, dancing, or closing my eyes.

B. Less narrow definition – the singing portion of the meeting.

C. A little broader – the Sunday meeting of the church

D. Broad definition

1. True and biblical worship is our whole life exaltation of God's glory in Christ in ways that please him and that He alone has made possible. (Ps. 150:1-2; Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 4:6; Rev. 5:11-12)
2. Includes, but not limited to, the gathering of Christians on Sunday morning, which will be our focus here.

III. Who Is the Real Worship Leader?

A. Typically, a musically gifted individual

1. The worship leader phenomena began in the 60's partly as a sincere response to dead, redundant, impersonal, poorly led singing in church meetings.
2. References in Old Testament are inconclusive for New Testament corporate worship.
 - a. Psalms
 - b. 1 Chronicles 16, 25
3. Many benefits from this trend:
 - a. Millions encountering and exalting God in fresh, vibrant ways.
 - b. Young people inspired to pursue a role in the church using their musical gifts.
 - c. An outpouring of God-centered, Christ exalting songs for congregational, family, and individual worship
4. For all these benefits, there are problems related to the current worship leader paradigm.
 - a. Worship leader based on a worldly model and mindset
 - b. Worship leaders can be tempted to function outside their giftedness (pastoral, teaching, theological, leadership, character)
 - c. Pastors often abdicate responsibility for congregational singing
 - d. Congregations can develop an unbiblical understanding of worship

- e. The role the worship leader play in exalting and encountering God is overestimated.

1Tim. 2:5 (ESV) For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

- 5. Works best when the worship leader has::
 - a. Godly life and family (1 Tim. 3:1-13)
 - b. Passion for the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4)
 - c. Grasp of practical and biblical theology (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
 - d. Pastoral leadership gifting

B. Biblically, the pastor (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-2)

- 1. A pastor is responsible to oversee all aspects of the church, including the meeting, and not just the preaching. (singing, testimonies, public prayer, scripture reading, the Lord's supper, video, drama, etc.)
- 2. Leading a congregation each Sunday to exalt God is a pastoral function, not a musical one.
 - a. Singing and preaching are not two opposing or completely distinct activities.
 - 1) In both we seek to increase the impact of God's word on our minds, emotions, and wills.
 - 2) Our aim should be to make good use of musicians, without idolizing them or overstating their importance.
 - b. Singing is a means of teaching the church.

“The vast majority [of Christians] will learn their theology from their experiences of worship.” (Ronald Byars, The Future of Protestant Worship, p. 73)
- 3. Ideal when the one leading corporate praise is a pastor.

- C. The REAL worship leader when we gather is Jesus, who perfects our offering and leads us through His Spirit.

Heb. 2:11-12 (ESV) For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." (see also Heb. 7:23-25)

Christ our Worship Leader...stands before us as we lift our praise to the Father; we actually are allowed through the Spirit to participate in Christ's ongoing communion with the Father. This is true not only because Jesus the perfect sacrifice bought our redemption with His blood; but also because He always lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25); and because as Perfect Man He represents us in continuing worship before the Father's throne. (Ron Man, *Christ Our Worship Leader*)

It is not honest or appropriate to ignore our failure and disobedience when we come before God, but the finality and perfection of Christ's atoning work should be at the forefront of our thinking and practice. (David Peterson, Engaging With God, p. 252)

IV. How Should We Respond?

- A. We must seek to clarify and expand our worship vocabulary.
1. We should think of worship more as a noun, or a verb needing a direct object, rather than using it as an adjective.
 2. Use words in addition to "worship" to describe singing to God. (corporate praise, congregational song, exalting God in song, the singing time)
 3. Apply the category of "worship" to activities other than singing. (receiving tithes and offerings, honoring, prayer, teaching and listening to God's word, evangelism, serving...)
 4. Interchange "worship leader" with other terms to describe the one who leads congregational worship. (worship pastor, lead musician, music team leader, pastoral musician, music pastor, corporate worship leader, leader of corporate praise, music and worship pastor...)

- B. We must develop, teach, and model a theology of music in the church.
1. Music's primary purpose in the Sunday meeting is for congregational singing. (Eph. 5:18-19, Col. 3:16-17)
Instruments should support that end.
 2. Music is a way of accomplishing different purposes in a meeting: teaching, admonishing, encouraging, praying, praising God, etc.
 3. Musicians can serve for God's glory in contexts outside the Sunday morning meeting (accompanying, special events, pre-meeting, training, evangelism)
 4. Recommended Resources
 - a. D.A. Carson, Worship by the Book, esp. Chap. 1
 - b. Harold Best, Music Through the Eyes of Faith, esp. Chap. 7
 - c. John Frame, Worship in Spirit and Truth
 - d. David Peterson, Engaging with God
- C. Pastors must identify and wisely respond to those God has placed around him as potential leaders. Here are some possible scenarios:
1. Lack of musicians
 - a. Pastor can lead in a cappella singing, with emphasis on other ways to exalt and respond to God.
 - b. Consider importing mature musicians from like-minded churches, but continue to give direction and leadership.
 - c. Pray!
 2. Lack of godly character in musicians
 - a. Not much different from the first situation.
 - b. Go slow. It's easier to add a leader than to ask them to step down.

3. Lack of theological discernment and/or leadership gifting in a lead musician
 - a. Pastor should contribute and provide clear direction before, during, and after the meeting.
 - b. He should also train the musician in weak areas (song selection, themes, emphases, creative elements)
 - c. This musician might be effective in training and leading other musicians behind the scenes.
 4. A musician who is strong in all areas
 - a. Probably a deacon or potential pastor
 - b. Opportunity for co-laboring to serve the congregation.
- D. Lead musicians must be committed to seeking and submitting to pastoral leadership. (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5)
1. This requires seeking out direction and communicating consistently and clearly.
 2. Submit plans in advance, and ask for input afterwards.
 3. Everything should flow from and highlight the significance of the Gospel and God's Word to us.