

THE COMPLETE **WORSHIP LEADER** **TRAINING MANUAL**

Core Training In
The Heart & Skills Of The
Effective Worship Leader

6 Essential Topics

- ✓ Worship Leading Skills
- ✓ Worship Ministry Leadership Skills
- ✓ Worship Songwriting Skills
- ✓ Worship Values
- ✓ Worship Theology
- ✓ Worship History

Includes:

- Easy to read, short sections
- Study questions
- Tools (Evaluations, Worship Circles, and more)
- Group study format option
- Video links to Dan Wilt discussion starters
- Insights from respected worship voices today

by **Dan Wilt, M.Min.**

Essentials in Worship with Dan Wilt

By Dan Wilt, M.Min.

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The *Essentials in Worship* course is dedicated to you as a
Worship leader,
Worship songwriter,
Worship musician,
Worship visual tech,
Worship sound tech, and/or
Worship arts leader.

You have no idea what a gift you can be to our world, by leading worship faithfully.

You are narrating the story of humanity through the music you make,
the art you create, and through the songs you select.

You are leading us all to do the same.

Thank you for saying yes to the call.

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A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

First of all, thank you for investing in the *Essentials in Worship* course material. It is my personal belief that what you hold in your hands is a powerful investment in the worship life of your *entire* local church.

In my experience, when a worship leader is impacted, and when musicians and techs are impacted, a church is impacted for the long-term.

It is also my deep belief that when a church invests in the training of its worship leaders and team members, the ROI (return on investment) can be *exponential* in the worship experience of that church over time.

I'm confident that using *Essentials in Worship* in your ministry will have that kind of payoff for your church, as it has for so many other churches.

The Story Behind Essentials

Essentials in Worship was created because, after 20+ years of leading worship and leading worship ministries, I knew there were foundational ideas about worship—practical, philosophical, and theological—that every worship leader needed to have in their tool belt.

In fact, I needed to better understand many things about the complex world of worship leadership myself.

My story at the time was like that of many worship leaders I knew. I'd been serving for over 20+ years as a worship pastor, worship trainer, resource developer, senior pastor, recording songwriter (Vineyard Worship), and worship arts university professor—all while leading contemporary worship in my local church.

I learned in the school of hard knocks how to, for example, relate to my pastor, build an effective worship set, write a song, and arrange a band.

At conferences and seminars I'd also had the unique privilege of interviewing, and being influenced by, some of the most gifted worship leaders and songwriters of our generation.

Hearing voices like Matt Redman and N.T. Wright talk about worship (I had the great privilege of interviewing Wright in his home in Westminster Abbey), I was moved by the practical insights and theological truths flowing from their hearts.

Gathering Up The Gold

I often wished those gold nuggets of wisdom I was gathering about worship leading—from the practical skills to the heart behind it—could be forged into a simple, strong training program that would enrich my local church's worship training.

I had worship leaders and a team to train—and I needed input myself!

As I was struggling to find the right material, in the right format and package, to easily train my crew in the foundational heart attitudes and practical skills necessary for effective worship leading, I hit a crisis point.

I would have to do something about it. I decided to gather up those few decades of insights from so many respected leaders and to put them together into the *Essentials In Worship* material you have before you.

Thousands of Worship Leaders and Teams, Learning Together

I got to work, with support from others, designing *Essentials in Worship* to be a digital enrichment course to train my worship leaders/teams locally, and to offer to friends and fellow worship leaders globally.

I then started *WorshipTraining.com* to deliver that material to friends who were asking for it in many places, adding in other tools I believed would help my fellow worship leaders.

The rest is, as they say, history.

Since that decision, literally thousands of worship leaders and musicians have now used *Essentials in Worship* to up their game—and more are joining in all the time. Meanwhile, at *WorshipTraining*, tens of thousands of worship leaders, musicians, and techs have gathered to grow online.

The goal of *Essentials* was straightforward – to provide an easy to use, accessible, time saving training tool for worship leaders that delivers core ideas about worship to their doorstep as they work at their jobs and in their churches.

The last few years have proven that goal has been reached! I get emails all the time telling me how *Essentials* is changing the game for many Sunday after Sunday.

Essentials was simply the kind of tool I needed to train my worship community, and I trust *Essentials* will be a tool that serves you at your point of need for years to come.

No Church Left Behind

To reach every local church on planet earth (seriously, we want to serve everyone), the price of *Essentials* has always been kept lower than the cost of sending one person to one conference this year. As well, a portion of all proceeds from the sale of *Essentials* goes toward helping children escape poverty.

On a personal level, I don't want any church to be without *Essentials* because they can't afford it. For that reason, I've always had a policy that if any church can't afford the sale price, they can email me and we'll find a way to get this tool into their hands.

So, if you know of a church (or churches), or a worship leader (or worship leaders), that could use the tool that is *Essentials in Worship*, please let us know by emailing danwiltresources@gmail.com.

Note: *Essentials* will also be translated into Spanish, French, German, and Portuguese, so keep your eyes open at DanWilt.com and WorshipTraining.com for those versions.

Visit Me At DanWilt.com

In conclusion, I want to personally invite you to join me at my worship equipping blog, www.DanWilt.com, for weekly training tools you can email to your teams and leaders.

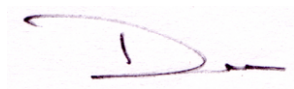
It's an added support to *Essentials*, and I expand on ideas from *Essentials* regularly. There are also a few thousand fellow worship leaders at my blog in conversation who can encourage you.

Sign up for the email list, and my weekly posts will go right into your inbox. You can then easily forward them on to others you think would benefit from them.

Ready, Set, Grow.

I trust *Essentials in Worship* will encourage you, inspire you, and renew you in your understanding of worship and its leadership in the 21st century.

Cheers to us growing forward as lead worshippers in our generation,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to be 'Dan Wilt', with a stylized flourish.

Dan Wilt, M.Min.
Nashville, TN

www.DanWilt.com
www.WorshipTraining.com

HOW TO USE ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

I am so glad you chose *Essentials in Worship*. My prayer is that in these pages, and in the videos that accompany them, your vision and skills in worship leadership will be expanded, inspired, and renewed.

What Is *Essentials in Worship*?

Essentials in Worship is a local church worship training series that targets worship leaders of every experience level. It is designed to train you, the worship leader, in core ideas and skills within the philosophy of leading worship. In addition to this, *Essentials* also provides unique training sections intended to reach your entire team, enriching *everyone* in your worship ministry.

Ultimately, *Essentials in Worship* is less about you being trained and more about putting tools in your hands that will stir reflection, start discussion, and deposit life-changing ideas in your worship ministry community.

Thousands of worship leaders (including musicians, sound techs, visual techs, and worship arts leaders) use this media material to strengthen their entire worship ministry.

Accessible to Worship Leaders and Teams

Accessible, and with an emphasis on developing both worship leaders and their entire team, *Essentials in Worship* aims at laying foundations through quick, accessible mini-studies that are within the time and energy reach of the local church worship volunteer.

Essentials in Worship is accessible and has been tested to strengthen youth leaders, small group leaders, main session leaders, musicians, techs, worship arts leaders, and pastors—anyone who wants to dig into *essential* ideas about worship.

For those who are not worship leaders using *Essentials*, the list below identifies which sections of this book are best suited to which members of your worship ministry.

While worship leaders should read all of the material, and everyone can learn something from all the sections, some sections are more particularly tailored to unique groups in your worship team like worship leaders, songwriters, musicians, techs, and worship arts overseers. Pastors will also find helpful ideas on worship in the values, theology, and history sections.

Who Should Do Which Essentials Sections?

Essentials in Worship is made up of 6 sections in this manual—each with 4-session ‘mini-studies’ on a key topic.

The following sections make up the Essentials experience:

1. **Essentials in Worship Leading**
Designed for worship leaders in all areas of your church, including those serving in main session, youth group, small group, men and women’s group, and children’s ministry.
2. **Essentials in Worship Ministry**
Designed for worship leaders, worship pastors, and worship arts pastors—anyone who oversees a worship leadership ministry in a local church.
3. **Essentials in Worship Songwriting**
Designed for worship leaders, songwriters, musicians, and congregants—anyone who would like to write a song and learn the basics of the process.
4. **Essentials in Worship Values**
Designed for worship leaders, musicians, techs, arts leaders, and pastors—anyone who cares about the primary values that reveal why we lead worship.
5. **Essentials in Worship Theology**
Designed for worship leaders, musicians, techs, arts leaders, and pastors—anyone who would like to begin to explore big ideas about God, people, and worship.
6. **Essentials in Worship History**
Designed for worship leaders, musicians, techs, arts leaders, and pastors—anyone interested in exploring how the Church has worshipped across time.

How You Can Use Essentials

This study experience is designed to work well either as an individual learning guide or for group learning. *Essentials* can also sit at the core of your “required learning” for *anyone* wanting to be involved in church worship ministry and/or for training new members of your team.

Use Essentials as a personal study.

We recommend doing one section at a time in the *Essentials in Worship Course*. Feel free to spread them out and complete them at your pace. Read the material, then watch the videos that go with them.

When starting a section, we encourage you to:

7. **Read** just one session per day, or spread it out even longer if you wish. (Rushing through without extended time for reflection can limit the return on the training experience).
8. **Watch** the video for that week.
9. **Write** your answers to the Study Questions at the end of each session as a helpful way to process the ideas. Even find someone with whom you can share your insights over coffee along the way.

Use Essentials as a group study.

The *Essentials in Worship Course* is also designed to be experienced in a group setting if that is preferable.

When doing one of the sections:

1. **Gather** your group.
2. **Read** the session for that week.
3. **Watch** the video for that week.
4. **Discuss** the content with the Study Questions for that week.

It's that simple to do a section and to grow together.

More Thoughts on Doing Essentials as a Group

For the reading part, I would encourage you to have your group pre-read the material before gathering together. This way each of you will have reflected on it a bit before meeting.

Another option is to take turns reading the session for that meeting aloud together, with each person reading a paragraph at a time. This engages both the hearing and reading parts of our brains and encourages both retention and fresh thoughts about the material as you experience it together.

My brief video then follows, which reviews some of the ideas with a few added stories and sound bites thrown in from my experience.

Feel free to modify the discussion, including adding in any relevant materials and questions you would like to bring to the course from your own tradition.

A Special Note on the Songwriting Section Group Experience

In the Songwriting section, you'll be sharing songs as a part of your gathering time. The *How to Start a Songwriting Circle* video is designed to help you get started, so plan for more time to meet and have people do their reading and song prep beforehand.

Why Are Words in Bold in the Book?

The *Essentials in Worship Course* is intended to be a powerful tool for your entire worship ministry to get a handle on some essential ideas about worship. For that reason, we often highlight key words we want you to notice, remember, and reflect on.

Highlighting these **words** and **phrases** will go a long way in helping your leaders and teams to discuss big ideas about worship for years to come.

When you remember words and phrases, the rest of the content or idea may come flooding back to you.

Want to Go Even Deeper into an Area?

Essentials in Worship is designed so anyone can give an **hour or two a week** to grow in their worship understanding.

You may want to, however, go deeper still. To further maximize your study, we suggest a supplementary book or media piece below that will bring even more fresh ideas to the surface.

Again, this book or media is simply supplemental—you will get enough out of the course if you don't choose to read/view this material.

The recommended “extra book or media” for each section is noted below.

Video Links

The links to the corresponding teaching videos at the beginning of each session are provided for the streaming access of All Access members of WorshipTraining.com (others can only view 30 seconds of content).

For those who purchased by download, the videos are on your hard drive from when you downloaded the course, and they can be viewed from there.

Supplemental Books & Media for Deeper Study

Each of the Essentials sections *can be enhanced* with another book that will greatly amplify what you get out of this experience.

Essentials in Worship Leading

Extra Book: *How to Lead Worship without Being a Rock Star* by Dan Wilt

Essentials in Worship Ministry

Extra Book: *To Know You More* by Andy Park

Essentials in Worship Songwriting

Extra DVD: *Worship Songwriting* (10 hr. DVD series) by Brian Doerksen

Essentials in Worship Values

Extra Book: *Perspectives on Worship: Five Views* by various authors

Essentials in Worship Theology
Extra Book: *Simply Christian* by N.T. Wright

Essentials in Worship History
Extra Book: *Ancient Future Time* by Robert E. Webber

Want even more training courses, retreat materials, and media? Then see this next item.

WorshipTraining.com is the Gold Mine for Team Skills Resources.

Essentials in Worship is also available via streaming and download at WorshipTraining.com.

In addition to *Essentials in Worship*, you can also access *thousands* of other courses, DVDs, videos, audios, articles and extra resources by becoming an All Access Member (individually or with your church).

See my [Whiteboard Worship Training videos](#) that cover sound, vocal, songwriting and many other topics (over 70 practical topics via whiteboard lessons!).

3000+ training tools are right at your fingertips coming from across the body of Christ and from major publishers.

All are online and ready for download.

Visit www.worshiptraining.com for a free membership for all your leaders and team members and to find out more.



Ready, Set, Grow.

No matter how you choose to grow with us, we trust *Essentials in Worship* will encourage you, inspire you, and renew you in your understanding of worship and its leadership in the 21st century.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP LEADING

Leading worship is a high calling. Learn the heart and skills of the worship leader as you explore the heart attitudes of the worship leader, arranging a band, building a set, rehearsing, and mentoring others.

Videos for This Session:

- [Introduction: A Dangerous Mission](#) (2:22)

Introduction: A Dangerous Mission

*I have now been a worship leader for over 25 years and have spent most of that time watching, learning, and growing as a leader of corporate worship. I've spent much of that quarter of a century studying the **habits** and **skills** of some of the most effective contemporary worship leaders of our generation.*

This section is built on those insights, and I pray they help you to become the unique worship leader that God intended you to be.

Who Are We to Lead Worship?

Every Sunday morning, a man or woman steps up behind a microphone in the congregation or straps on their guitar on a Wednesday night in a small group or gets up in front of the youth to **lead** them in worship.

Who are we to lead anyone in worship? If you're like me, I often think to myself, "What am I doing here? If they only knew me, they wouldn't let me lead this congregation anywhere!" But God knows better. Who are we to lead worship?

We are followers of Jesus who are able to sing and/or play an instrument and who have a calling from God to create musical **spaces** in which people can enter into conversation with the Lord of their lives.

Our role as worship leaders works in tandem with other roles, like a harmony. The pastor, children's leader, small group leader, musicians, artists, techs, and ushers all have a part to play in creating a space in which people can **interact** with the Lord of our worship.

Our Lives Lead the Worship

In a culture that idolizes musicians and elevates emotions, we stand in front of people, behind a microphone and up on a stage **disciplining** people. We are training them with our musical choices and worship sets to *be like Jesus*. We must always remember that our lives sing louder than our musical instruments, and our pastoral leadership in worship shapes people in ways we never before thought possible.

*Excitement and danger—that is the **privilege** of worship leading.*

Becoming an Effective Worship Leader

Serving, loving, and leading in a local church is where the rubber meets the road. The worship leadership stage is where we learn to be givers in this life instead of takers. Stages and microphones do funny things to people; we hold our ground and lead worship as **spiritual leaders** and not just as artists.

As 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” In other words, we are given gifts and callings not for the service of our own visibility or personal sense of fulfillment—we are given the gifts we have *to serve others around us, while being energized by that service.*

Welcome then, to the humbling, exciting, transforming, enlightening, shocking, challenging, artful world of worship leading.

Welcome to Essentials in Worship Leading

This section has been designed to help you along in your quest to live your life in the presence of God as a worshipper, to serve your church community with your heart to lead worship, and to grow in the skills that make a *functional song leader* into an *effective lead worshipper*.

The 4 areas of worship leadership we will look at will be our building blocks for learning how to become more **effective** worship leaders. No matter your level of experience, there is something here for everyone.

I look forward to the journey with you. Welcome to *Essentials in Worship Leading*.

Session 1: The Three Reasons We Lead Worship

Videos for This Session:

- [Session 1: Three Reasons We Lead Worship](#) (6:03)

Why do you lead worship? This is a good question, and many worship leaders never take the time to answer it. Your answer might be, “I like it.” Your answer might be, “I was asked to do it.” You might say it’s your job, your passion, or even your calling.

If you answered in any of the ways above, as I often have, you will find that we both may have missed the point! All of these answers have to do with us, as if the reason we lead worship has everything to do with our preferences, job, passion, or even calling.

A Reason Bigger than Us

Worship is much, much bigger than you or I leading a set on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday night. The reason we lead worship is found in 1 John 4:19.

“We love Him, because He first loved us.”

This is the ultimate **reason** we worship. Worship is a big idea in the heart of God, and it involves everything that happens in life and everything that happens in a worship service. Ultimately, however, the **act** of worship has to do with people responding in love to the One who first loved them.

This is a good starting place for us. A worship leader helps people *respond* to God. We use songs, music, lyrics, bands, and visuals—and so much more—to help people respond to the God we worship. Worship leading is *responsive*. Jesus is the One who invites us to worship by love, and we help people **respond**.

How? We’ll get into that in a bit. For now, we can rest in knowing that being a worship leader is actually a biblical idea that we see in the Psalms. The great songwriters and worship leaders David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun are examples of those who led the mechanics of gathered worship. Yet, the kind of worship leaders we are, who use **music** as a **primary** tool to engage people with God, is a 20th century phenomenon.

But let’s not digress. Why is it so important to understand why we lead worship? Why is it so important to understand that worship is primarily a response to God?

Sandwiches, Weddings, and Worship

Pretend that you have been asked to make a sandwich. All of the meat, cheese, vegetables, bread, and sauces are laid out in front of you. With no further direction, you begin to bring together all of the culinary elements to make your sandwich the most delicious it can be.

Then, just as you are putting the finishing touches on your edible masterpiece, someone stops you. “By the way, the sandwich isn’t for *you*,” the person says. “It’s for the guy

sitting over in the corner.” Someone told you *what* to do, but they never told you *why* to do it.

In other words, *why* we do *what* we do is very important. In the sandwich analogy, without being given any context, you and I would tend to make the sandwich above according to our own purposes and our own tastes. However, the preferences, needs, desires, inspirations, tastes, and allergies that we think about when we know *why* we’re making the sandwich—in this case, for another person—guide us to make a very different kind of sandwich.

If worship is about people responding to God, then we are like the Best Man or Maid of Honor at a wedding. We are helping the Bride connect with the Groom. How strange it would be to see the Best Man making eyes at the Bride, when his job is to keep her **love** focused and tender toward her Groom!

I like to say that **songs are a place** to which people go to meet with God, encounter His love, and reaffirm His story in their lives.

Three Reasons We Lead Worship

From 1 John 4:19, the idea that worship is a response to God because He first loved us, we find three vital reasons that answer why we worship and why we lead others in worship.

1. God Invites Us to Worship, so We Respond to Him

I used to believe that when people gathered to worship, I was the one inviting them. I led the band, called the meeting, and set the stage. I was the host. I rehearsed to make it happen; I did the planning and showed up to deliver.

But that is actually not how it happened at all. It’s not right, true, or accurate to think that you and I as worship leaders are the ones who have invited this group to worship.

The true **Host** of any worship gathering is Jesus. We respond to His invitation to intimacy by coming to worship, and by creating a **space** in which others can worship.

2. God Has Made a Vow to Us, so We Renew Our Vows

Again, to lead worship is to play the part of the Best Man or the Maid of Honor in a wedding. In a wedding, the Bride and Groom are sharing vows—words of a shared commitment that will help them to always **remember** their surrender to the love of the other.

Songs are filled with lyrics that put words of commitment, thanksgiving, **loyalty**, love, and honor in the mouths of the worshipper. When we as worship leaders are transparent, seeking to get out of the way while making bridges through

music, we are at our best.

3. God Has Pursued Us, so We Remember His Story

Remember your grammar classes from school? The *subject* of a sentence acts out of the *verb* of a sentence toward the *object* of a sentence. Who is the subject of the worship sentence? Us? God? Who is the one doing the action of the verb?

According to the whole counsel of the Scriptures, and according to 1 John 4:19, *God* is the **subject** of the first worship sentence. He acts out the verb of love toward us, the **object** of his care, healing, transformation, discipline, and power.

When we lead worship, we are helping people to remember that order and to keep their lives in accord with it.

Note: When we put ourselves at the beginning of the worship sentence (and some worship leaders do), then *we* do the work and God is responding to what we do. This creates hype, religious gymnastics, and congregations that think their hard worship work will somehow impress God. We don't want that disconnection with God's loving heart.

Like a Father, God is only impressed when we **respond to His love** for us. "Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him" (Romans 12:1, the Message).

When we turn all of life into a simple response to the love of God (1 John 4:19), we are truly becoming the worshippers for whom the Father is searching (John 4:24). God is pursuing us, and we respond. This is the fundamental premise of worship in all of its forms.

The *Why* Comes before the *How* and the *What*

Like building a skyscraper, if we don't get the foundation right, straight, and stable, we don't get *anything* right.

Being an effective worship leader means we understand why we are doing this. If we ever get confused and start to think that worship leading is about the stage or about our opportunity to express our ministry or about gaining a stepping stone in our musical worship/rock-star career, then we should either get out from behind the microphone or get on our faces until our hearts are right.

So let's raise the bar. Worship leading can be a tough gig, but with the calling of God at our back, we can step into this **privileged role** and by the grace and mercy of God serve those to whom He calls us. In a living room or in an arena, *why* we worship *matters*.

Okay I'll Do It Again

Hear these profound words about worship leadership that came from a conversation with good friend Brian Doerksen, the writer of “Come, Now Is the Time to Worship.”

Read this slowly, and allow it to give you words for **renewing** your commitment to lead God’s people in worship:

Again there is this element—how do you present a God who is beyond presentation? How do you explain a God who is beyond explanation? How do you sing, how do you pick a song that best describes either who God is or even how we feel?

It’s always just slightly beyond us, and so there is always that feeling in the pit of my stomach saying, “What did I do? How did I get talked into this?” And then I remember, “Oh yeah, God, you called me to do this.

Okay, I’ll do it again.”¹

Session 1 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes, and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. Why do we lead worship?

In your own words, write out the reasons that a worship leader exists and what our primary role is when we step up to a microphone or lead in any group.

Session 2: Character & Skills of the Worship Leader

Videos for This Session:

- [Session 2: The Character & Skills of the Worship Leader](#) (5:27)

Now that we're committed to being worship leaders for the right reason of helping people respond to God's love, we have a context for the practical tasks we must do as worship leaders. Suddenly, learning parts from recordings, preparing set lists, rehearsing mid-week for a few hours, getting up early on a Sunday morning to set up gear and to sound check, choosing to love in relationships between volunteers, and playing for two or three services a week takes on a meaningful context.

The Role of the Worship Leader: A Space Creator

In a beautiful way, the reality that we are leading people to respond to God's gifts of love can make all the hard work seem to be a grand **privilege** (this feeling is not always present at 6:00 am on Sunday morning, mind you).

We are in the role we are in, as lead worshippers, to make a way for people to meet with God and to create a space where simple songs can put wings to the prayers of those who have gathered to worship. We **usher** people gently to a place where they can respond to the love of God—it's as simple as that.

Get it? Got it? Good. Let's repeat this: *The worship leader is called to create a space in which God's people can respond to the love of God.* Keep repeating this truth until you lead your final worship set.

The Role of the Songs We Lead: Affection and Truth

In the same conversation mentioned in the last session, Brian Doerksen proposed this question as we talked about the role of the songs we lead in worship:

Why do we sing songs in the first place? We do it because it is something that we can do together. There are probably other things that we could do to express our love and our worship to God that would be, in one sense, just as valid, but they're not easy for us to do together.

Yet we can get ten people, or a hundred people, or a thousand, or a hundred thousand—whatever number we choose—and we can all get together and sing a song. That song reflects what is going on in our hearts and our minds, together.

There is truth that we're affirming, but there's also affection that we're expressing. That's why I think that singing as an expression of worship has stood the test of time.

In other words, when we use the power of poetic lyrics, blended with the power of music, we are literally creating a *place* where God can meet with people and where people can meet with God.

Songs Are a Place We Go

Songs are indeed a *place*. They are an encountering ground where our prayers can take flight on the wings of words and melodies. As a worship team, when we select, practice, prepare, and perform songs in the tapestry that we call *a worship set*, we are literally creating a place for people to **encounter** God.

Someone very dear to me was working as an aide in Northern Kenya. In the night, Somali terrorists broke into the hotel room where he was staying, abducting him and two other aides. Threatened with torture and death, laid out in the hot desert sun, and deprived of sufficient food and water for months, this person and the others endured a living hell.

When I asked him how he got through it, and if worship played any role, he said something that profoundly affected me as a worship leader. “Dan,” he said, “do you know Rita Springer?” It just so happens that Rita is a dear friend of mine. He told me that he would sing her songs over and over again in his mind, finding strength to face the next horrors that lay before him. No angels sang. No heavens opened. But he found a **place of meeting** with God in simple songs of faith and worship, and a sonic **sanctuary** was created for him in “the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23).

When Can I Go and Meet with God?

Every time the people in your church gather for worship, you can know this: They are, on a regular basis, facing their own daily “valley of the shadow of death.” We as worship leaders gather them together, having all been **invited** there by our living Lord Jesus, to engage with the music and **liturgies** of worship we’ve prepared.

But we’re not the only ones who did some work to prepare for that time. The congregation is coming to collaborate, to add their longing and passion to the mix (though you may be thinking, “I don’t see much longing and passion in the eyes of my congregation!”)

People come to a time of worship saying in the quiet of their hearts what the psalmist said in Psalm 42:3, “When can I go and meet with God?” The worship leader responds, “How about here? How about now?” and leads them to that place of meeting. We don’t need them to be expressive, demonstrative, and outward with their worship.

We have a job to do, and we simply do it.

We take our place as a **leader** of worship.

What Is Your Loudest Instrument?

Many times I have had both the privilege and the challenge of sharing with worship leaders on the topics of integrity and godly character as primary hallmarks of an effective worship leader. I often prompt the discussion by asking a leading question,

such as “What is the strongest, and most powerful instrument you lead with as a worship leader?”

The responses are as varied as the musical preferences in the room. “My voice.” “My guitar.” “My keyboard.” Someone inevitably speaks up, in a commonly shy manner, and gives the answer behind the answers: “My **life**.” All heads in the room nod in agreement as we strike a profound spiritual chord together.

Biblically and experientially, we understand that a powerful life is the most permeating, inspiring, transforming, and impacting leadership instrument the Lord wields in His hand. Put another way, your life and mine are God’s “worship leading instruments” of choice, especially when they make a sound that is pleasing to Him.

What Are the Character Traits of the Effective Worship Leader?

In worship leaders, we are looking primarily for disciples of Jesus who are strong in character and not simply full of gifting (or full of themselves!). In other words, *who a person is* in the secret place of their hearts is infinitely more important to us than *how they play* their instrument, sing or function in front of a crowd.

Having said that, it is also true that we value the power of beautiful and well-played worship music, but only if it flows from hearts of people who are content to give Jesus, and others, the place of prominence.

A worship leader is a spiritual leader who pastors the congregation every time they step up to lead worship. For that reason, all the **qualities** that we look for in any spiritual **leader** in the Church—be they a pastor, elder, small group leader, or worship leader—are similar.

Questions Leaders Must Ask About a Worship Leader

- *Are they humble?*
- *Do they have a vibrant secret life with God?*
- *Are they able to take direction or correction?*
- *Are the accolades and affirmations of people too important to them?*
- *Are they doing what they do to serve or to gain respect?*
- *Are they good husbands or wives, parents and family members?*
- *Are they willing to train others to take over for them?*
- *Are they skilled at what they do?*
- *Are they teachable and eager to learn?*
- *Are they willing to quietly care for the poor as much as they are willing to stand on a stage?*
- *Are they loving, gentle and generous with all those around them?*

- *Do they have a substantial interior life with God that reflects itself in their outward lifestyle?*

Additionally, as the late John Wimber put it (the mentor of literally thousands of worship leaders around the world today), we must value *character* above *gifting*.

We want our worship leaders, in his words:

- *to be passionate pursuers of God*
- *to love the Scriptures and to know them well*
- *to seek unity in the whole Church*
- *to live with compassion and mercy toward all people*
- *to mentor and equip others beyond themselves*
- *to relationally care for the people around them*
- *to live generous lives that are outward in focus*
- *to value simple and authentic ways of living, praying, and worshipping*
- *to be risk-takers who are willing to go where God seems to be going*

The Skills of the Worship Leader

Now we're ready to begin talking about the **skills** of the worship leader.

Let's assume a few things. You probably either play the guitar or the keyboard. Most worship leaders lead from one of these two instruments. Why? Because they are common to contemporary music, they are harmonic (accompaniment) instruments, and they can be used to musically and rhythmically lead a band.

If you play another instrument, good on you! If you play no instrument, you probably lead alongside a keyboardist or a guitar player. If you play the tuba, there will be more for you in our next book, *Leading Worship from Instruments That Are Downright Painful to Play*. Let's assume you know how to play your instrument; let's now begin to unpack what it takes to lead worship *well*.

Learn by Doing

When I first become a worship leader, I was thrown in headfirst. So were many of the worship leaders I spoke to later who were leading in those days. We weren't training each other—we were all just trying to give everything we had!

In fact, I started leading worship in my small United Methodist church in Pennsylvania, USA, before I even knew what worship leading was! My three-piece band and I would do concerts for churches and youth groups in our area by combining chords and lyrics we found in songbooks with our own melodies and grooves. People were responding to God during these precious times in packed rooms, and before we knew it, something was

happening that was way beyond the music we were playing. God was showing up in our small town, and we were along for the bumpy ride.

By the time I was put in front of a band of professional musicians to **arrange** the instruments, **plan** a set, create **flow**, **organize** the team, and do everything else a worship leader does, I was so unsure of myself that I would literally change my set 10–15 times before I landed on the final list!

Veteran worship leader Andy Park (“In the Secret”) says this to encourage worship leaders:

So don't be afraid to learn by doing, even though the earliest steps are sometimes slow and awkward. You'll never get anywhere unless you start at square one.²

Whether you are leading worship in a living room or in front of thousands, **diving in** is the best way to cut your teeth as a worship leader. If you've been doing this for years, hanging in there and continuing to lead in new environments follows the same principle—*learn by doing*.

Irish worship leader Kathryn Scott (“Hungry”) described her journey into worship leading this way:

I started off leading a bit of worship in college but I was really, really dreadful at it, and was encouraged never to do it again! At the same time, some of my other friends said, “You've got something in there.” I felt so insecure that I just thought I'd never do it again. But when I moved to Glasgow after college to get married, a guy there asked if I would become the worship leader in his church. I felt a nudge from the Holy Spirit that this was something He had in mind for me to do. So, in fear and trepidation, I decided I would give it a go, and the Lord showed up. It was great!³

Worship Leading Is an Art and a Science

Worship leadership is both an art and a science, *and we can learn to do it better and better*.

It is an art in that it takes musical intuition and a natural grace in leading—both of which can be cultivated to some degree. It is a science (though not rocket science) because there are practical, logical, **best-practices** approaches to it that can make everyone's consistent experience better, including your own.

Worship leadership is a sacred, strange, profound concoction of:

- Effective musical skill
- Organization and preparation
- Experience
- Practice
- Leadership ability
- Relational ability

- Calling
- Character
- Intuition
- Natural gifting
- God's grace

I am constantly amazed at how practical spiritual activity and ministry really is, and how often the rudiments of good devotional, musical, and pastoral skills affect the dynamics of both the worship experience and the worship leading experience.

You Are a Lead Worshipper

When considering the skills of the worship leader, it is vital we understand that as a worship leader, you are effectively a lead worshipper, leading the way in music and songs for others by worshipping with them yourself.

This mindset helps a worship leader to flow smoothly from song to song, not jarring or scaring the worshippers with your transitions. When people sense that you are worshipping with the songs and that your instrument is a fluid **tool** in your hands to that end, then they are able to comfortably go with you to that place of exchange with God.

The Three Core Skills of the Effective Worship Leader

A few big tips are in order here. I've spent time over the years both watching and interacting with many people I would call "lead worshippers" (I could list many of them here, and you'd immediately recognize their names; others are those I've encountered over the years who are only famous in their local church).

There are three **core skills** that I've seen them, and others like them, hone over years. These skills are the breeding ground for effective worship leadership.

1. The Skill of Secret-Placing

These leaders love their secret life with God. Cultivate your own heart as a worshipper alone. The biblical David's life was built on his secret-place life, and the songs and leadership that marked his life were built on a cultivated intimacy with God that enabled him to "become even more undignified than this" (1 Sam. 6:22) before God and people. Leave the stage behind. Linger in your secret place with your instrument before God. Pray with the music. Let it become a part of you and your relationship with God.

2. The Skill of Set-Building

Set-building leaders build simple sets around the character of God and faith. Songs

about who God is, strung simply together, consistently move souls toward the greater Story that underlies our lives. Songs about how we feel about God, or even how He feels about us, may season a set well and be biblically represented. But be careful because these same sets may make for a sappy experience when strung together all in row, all the time. The skill of building an effective worship set is covered in the next session.

3. The Skill of Set-Leading

These leaders care more about their congregation engaging than their musical platform yet their musicianship is tight, their pastoral care is strong, and a well-rehearsed band is non-negotiable for them whenever possible. They do whatever it takes to create a seamless, well-formed set that amplifies passion, celebrates redemption, minimizes distraction, and works together to tell a story over a 20–40-minute time slot.

With these character traits and leadership skills of the worship leader in mind, we are now ready to get very practical with building sets and leading bands.

Session 2 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. In what ways do you believe your character needs to grow as a worship leader?

Review the lists in this session. What areas in your own life do you believe are already strong and which need to be strengthened in your character before you move into more worship-leading activity?

3. What new core skills did this session make you begin to think about acquiring?

Three core worship leading skills were discussed in this session. What arenas of growth can you see being the most important to you right now?