



*Worship Leader  
Training Book*

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Dear Worshipper,

If you're holding a copy of this manual you should know two things. First, someone sees potential in you. It is no small call to lead God's people in His worship. I tell you this at the risk of inflating your pride (the opposite of worship leading), but someone saw a heart that treasured Christ in you. Guard it. Put off sinful habits and put on the righteousness that makes you look more like Christ.

Second, you should know that you have a tough road ahead. Leading musical worship in church is not always as easy as some make it seem. We may like to see our favorite Christian artists lead music at a conference and say "that's what I want to do." Right now, however, you need to recognize that leading music in a church setting is far different... actually, far better. Yours is the task of shepherding people through music—of helping them pursue Christ-likeness as you seek to allow the Holy Spirit engage their minds and encourage their hearts.

So, all of this is to say that I hope this resource finds a willing heart to embrace what is found within. I hope that this book will encourage God's church to genuine, Christ-exalting, life-altering worship. I hope that as you behold the glory of the Lord you are also transformed (2 Cor. 3:18). In short, I hope that God finds maximum glory in this minimal and limited effort.

Soli Deo Gloria,

Jason Bradshaw

# Session #1- What Is Worship?

Being that there is a great deal of romanticism surrounding the idea of worship, it is important that we get down to a definition of what worship is. Otherwise we may be prone to worshipping worship itself, rather than the God who deserves our praise.

“there is a profound sense in which excellent worship cannot be attained merely by pursuing excellent worship. In the same way that, according to Jesus, you cannot find yourself until you lose yourself, so also you cannot find excellent corporate worship until you stop trying to find excellent corporate worship and pursue God Himself. Despite the protestations, one sometimes wonders if we are beginning to worship *worship* rather than worship *God*. As a brother put it to me, it’s a bit like those who begin by admiring the sunset and soon begin to admire themselves admiring the sunset.”<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, we have a tendency to make worship more about us than it is about the God to whom it should be directed. Perhaps some Biblical grounding will provide the humility to stop this tendency.

## Toward a Definition

How about a few sample definitions to get us started:

“Worship is the believers’ response of all that they are—mind, emotions, will, and body—to what God is and says and does. This response has its mystical side in subjective experience and its practical side in objective obedience to God’s revealed will. Worship is a loving response that’s balanced by the fear of the Lord, and it is a deepening response as the believer comes to know God better.”<sup>2</sup>

“...the worship of the living and true God is essentially an engagement with him on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible.”<sup>3</sup>

“Biblical worship is God’s covenant people recognizing, reveling in, and responding rightly to the glory of God in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

As David Peterson writes, “the theme of worship is far more central and significant in Scripture than many Christians imagine.”<sup>5</sup> It is certainly a monumental task to seek to define something so central to the Bible’s story. However, there are certain elements to worship which every believer needs to understand:

## A Few Essential Principles of Worship

- Worship Always Involves a Mediator- due to our inherent (Rom. 5:12) and practical sin (Rom. 3:10-18), we cannot enter into God’s presence alone. The

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *Worship By The Book*, p. 31; ©2002 Zondervan.

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W., *Real Worship*, p.26; ©2000 Baker Books

<sup>3</sup> Peterson, David, *Engaging With God*, p. 20; ©1992 Inter-Varsity Press

<sup>4</sup> Bob Kauflin-- <http://www.worshipmatters.com/2005/11/07/defining-worship-part-2/>

<sup>5</sup> *Engaging*, p. 17

author of Hebrews thus tells us, “we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus” (Heb. 10:19). Old Testament ritual centered around a preview of Christ’s sacrifice. As well, New Testament and Church Age worship should do the same—centering around the sacrifice for our sins, Jesus Christ.

- God Has Created Us For the Purpose of His Own Glory- “...bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth, Everyone who is called by My name, *and whom I have created for my own glory*, whom I have formed even whom I have made” (Is. 43:6-7). God has made us for His glory. In fact, He has stated that He is a “jealous God” (Ex. 20:5) who will not give His glory to another (Is. 48:11).
- There Is Pleasure and Delight For the Worshipper- “My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God. *Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you*” (Ps. 84:2-4). God is often pictured as our true satisfaction (Jer. 2:13, Ps. 73:25-26, Ps. 42:1). “*In Your presence there is fullness of joy, in Your right hand there are pleasures forever*” (PS. 16:11).

## Old Testament Worship

It doesn’t take one long to realize the difference between the Old Testament forms of worship and what we practice today. There are significant distinctives for Old Testament worship that must be marked as such for us to recognize church age worship properly.

**The Altar/Tabernacle/Temple-** It doesn’t take one long to realize that there are specific places in the OT where worship is acceptable and other places where it is not. While it is implied in the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—who sacrificed at designated altars in worship—it is explicitly stated in the book of Leviticus:

Any man from the house of Israel who slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or who slaughters it outside the camp, and has not brought it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to present it as an offering to the LORD before the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguiltiness is to be reckoned to that man. He has shed blood and that man shall be cut off from among his people. The reason is so that the sons of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they were sacrificing in the open field, that they may bring them in to the LORD, at the doorway of the tent of meeting to the priest, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the LORD. (Lev. 17:3-5)

Even in the earliest cases, these temples or altars were set up in places where God has intentionally revealed Himself (Gen. 12:7-8;13:14-18; 28:10-22). Also, the tabernacle in Moses’ time is a symbol of God’s residing presence with His people.

(Ex. 25:8; 29:45). Finally, when Solomon has finished the temple and dedicated it, “the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD” (1 Kgs. 8:11).

The point to be made here is that God’s manifestation was His self-revelation. God was revealing Himself, and thus was worshipped at those specific locations.

<b>OT Character</b>	<b>Nature of Covenant</b>	<b>Form of Worship</b>	<b>Example Text</b>
Abraham	Unconditional	Altar	Gen. 12:7-8
Moses	Conditional	Tabernacle	Ex. 25:8
David	Unconditional	Temple (built by Solomon on account of David)	2 Sam. 7:4-16 (cf 1 Ch. 22:7-10)

### **The Sacrifice**

Another significant aspect of Old Testament worship is the sacrifice. Early in the book of Genesis we are introduced to the concept of sacrifice on behalf of sin as Adam and Eve are covered by the skin of an animal, which God Himself provides for them (Gen. 3:21). However, the theme of sacrifice is brought out even more clearly as Abel’s sacrifice, a blood sacrifice, is considered acceptable while Cain’s, a grain offering, is not (Gen. 4:3-4). Abraham also was to offer his son Isaac as an offering (Gen. 22:1-15). The book of Leviticus has a great deal to say about what sacrifices to offer in which particular circumstance.

In particular, Leviticus 16 shows us the picture of a scapegoat—an animal specifically meant to bear the blame of the people (Lev. 16:21). It’s here that we recognize that all people need a sin-bearer. We cannot bear our own iniquity, but rather need one to bear it on our behalf. This was not to be found in a bull or goat; even these anticipate the true sacrifice for sin, Jesus Christ.

### **The Priesthood**

The first time we are introduced to a priest in the Bible is when Abraham pays tribute to Melchizidek, who is both priest and king. The priesthood is officially initiated in the time of Moses by God to provide a people who would be set apart for service in the temple itself. As such, these men were to be consecrated for God’s use—not for common use—so that they could minister in God’s presence.

This is drawn out in a striking way in Numbers 16 where Korah, Dathan, and Abiram decide to confront Moses and Aaron on the basis that “all are holy” and should be able to minister as priests (16:3). This story ends with the ground swallowing up those who had questioned God’s plan.

The reminder is that man is in no place to mediate his own sacrifice. He is in need of someone to offer up sacrifice on his behalf so as to turn away God’s wrath toward sin, like Aaron standing with a censer between the dead and the living (16:48).

## New Testament Worship

In John 4, Jesus tells us that there is now a dynamic difference in New Testament worship. "...believe me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship me...but an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers" (Jn. 4:21-23). Specifically, Jesus draws attention to two things in his conversation with this Samaritan woman—significant changes have happened in the “where” and “how” of worship.

### Continuity and Discontinuity With Old Testament Worship

If we were to go back and look at the section above concerning the three defining aspects of Old Testament worship, we would find all of those aspects to be fulfilled in Christ. This is to say that Jesus is the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament cult. He is the temple that was torn down and rebuilt in 3 days (John 2:19-20). He is the sacrifice for our sin (1 Pet. 2:24-25). He is the great High Priest who continually offers sacrifice before the altar in heaven (Heb. 10:11-12).

Perhaps it would not be best to speak of these in terms of continuity and discontinuity but in terms of shadow and fulfillment. After all, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). The Old Testament system of worship, while equally functional and legitimate as its New Testament counterpart, was meant to find its consummation in Jesus Christ. What was hinted at is now clearly expressed.

Not only this, but we also, as we are in Christ, become fulfillment of the Old Testament cult;

“And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet. 2:4-5)

Just as Christ was the temple, priesthood and sacrifice so also we, as we are in Christ, fulfill those same functions.

	<b>Temple</b>	<b>Priest</b>	<b>Sacrifice</b>
<b>Jesus</b>	Jhn. 2:19; 4:21-23	Heb. 5:9-10	1 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 5:2
<b>Us</b>	1 Cor. 6:19	1 Pet. 2:9	Rom. 12:1-2

Regardless of the forms of worship, the heart of worship is consistent throughout the Bible. As David Peterson says:

“Throughout the Bible, acceptable worship means approaching or engaging with God on the terms that he proposes and in the manner that he makes possible. It involves honoring, serving, and respecting him, abandoning any loyalty or devotion that hinders an exclusive relationship with him. Although some of Scripture’s terms for worship may refer to specific gestures of homage, rituals or priestly ministrations, worship is more fundamentally faith expressing itself in obedience and adoration. Consequently, in both Testaments it is often shown to be a personal and moral fellowship with God relevant to every sphere of life.”<sup>6</sup>

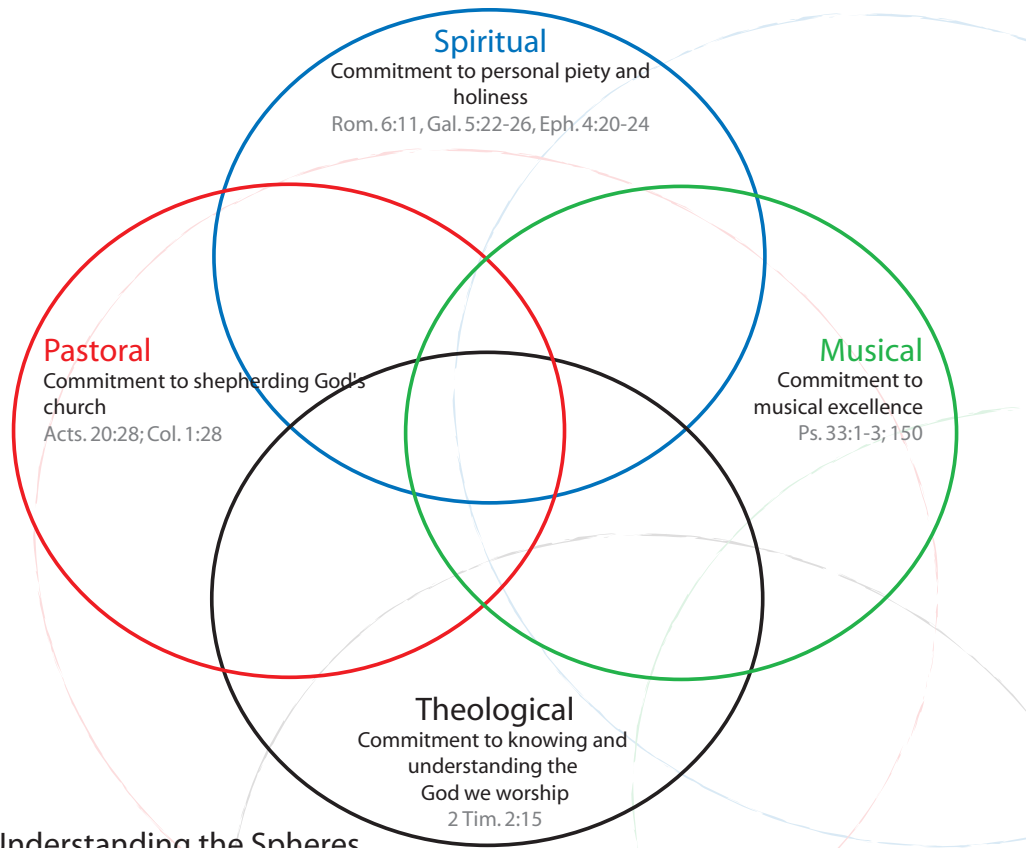
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<sup>6</sup> *Engaging*, p. 283

## Session #2- The 4 Spheres of Worship Leading

### The 4 Spheres of Worship Leading

While we cannot find the office of "worship leader" in scripture, we can find some various characteristics that would be good for those leading music to exhibit. The following 4 spheres are attributes that should increasingly define those leading musical worship.



#### Understanding the Spheres

##### Spiritual

The Spiritual sphere takes into account personal growth in holiness and discipline. This sphere wants to make sure that God is "the strength of (your) heart and (your) portion forever" (Ps. 73:26).

##### Pastoral

The Pastoral sphere encompasses all care and concern for the church of God. This sphere seeks to see every man presented complete in Christ (Col. 1:28)

##### Musical

The Musical Sphere involves all disciplines bent to understanding and enjoying music. This sphere seeks to make the best music; playing skillfully before the Lord (Ps. 33:3)

##### Theological

The Theological Sphere incorporates the disciplines of study of the character and attributes of God. This sphere wants to make sure that you are a workman approved, accurately handling the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15)

### Who will perform this task?

Having looked briefly at the concept of worship, the question remains as to who it will be led by. It might seem that the easy answer would simply be a worship leader. It is important to distinguish, however, that there are many who lead in

concepts of worship in our churches—preachers, teachers, etc. The definition of worship is broad enough for many in the church to be said to “lead in worship”. What we are particularly concerned with, though, is those who lead in musical worship.

As you notice the chart above, you find 4 defining characteristics of the musical worship leader.

1. **Spiritual-** This sphere is defined by a personal commitment to piety.

Rom. 6:11 “Even so *consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*”

Gal. 5:22-26- “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, (self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. *If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.*”

Eph. 4:20-24- “But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, *put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*”

2. **Theological-** But being spiritual is not possible without being well informed about who God is. As such, the theological sphere is also important.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, *accurately handling the word of truth.*” (2 Tim. 2:15)

“Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.” (1 Tim. 4:16)

3. **Musical-** Church music requires a thorough knowledge of music itself. This sphere encompasses not just knowledge but practice.

“Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones; Praise is becoming to the upright. Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; *Play skillfully with a shout of joy.*” (Psalm 33:1-3)

4. **Pastoral-** Church music is done in the church so that it might be beneficial to the body of Christ.

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to *shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*” (Acts 20:28)

“We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.” (Col. 1:28)

## Session #3- The Spiritual Sphere

It would be very convenient for us to simply skip this sphere and say, “if they desire to lead music, their lives must be in order”. However, it is my experience that worship leaders are often the most prone to living a public life that is vastly different from their private life. With that in mind, we cannot overemphasize the need for personal holiness while leading others in music. The heart of worship is delight, and when this is transferred to some other object than God, worship is lost. It is not possible to, at the same time love sin and delight in God (Ps. 51:12).

## Understanding Progressive Sanctification

How do we change? Theologically speaking, we know that before we come to Christ we are slaves to sin (Rom. 6:6). This is not to say that we couldn't do good things, just that we couldn't do them to please God. So how do we change our situation?

## Understanding Sin

We'll start with a basic definition of sin;

“Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature”<sup>7</sup>

Let's break that down a bit;

- “any failure to conform to the moral law of God...”

“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and *sin is lawlessness*” (1 John 3:4)

“because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for *it does not subject itself to the law of God*, for it is not even able to do so.” (Rom. 8:7)

- “...In act...”

“You shall not make for yourself an idol...take the name of the LORD your God in vain...”, etc. (Ex. 20)

- “...In attitude...”

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house...” (Ex. 20:17)

“but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her *in his heart*.” (Matt. 5:28)

- “...or nature.”

“Behold, *I was brought forth in iniquity*, and in sin my mother conceived me.” (Ps. 51:5)

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<sup>7</sup> Grudem, Wayne, Systematic Theology. (Leicester, England; Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 490

*“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of good is not.” (Rom. 7:18)*

*“because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Rom. 8:7)*

Okay, lets break this last section down ever further;

## Understanding Our Nature

As we’ve already stated, we are completely incapable of doing good before God. We are, as Romans would say, slaves to sin. Obviously, sin entered the world through Adam (Rom. 5:12) and has spread to all mankind. Adam’s sin affects us in two primary ways;

- **Inherited Guilt<sup>8</sup>**

*“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” (Rom. 5:12)*

Adam didn’t just sow his DNA into the human race, he also passed on his culpability before God—death has spread to all men.

*“for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam until Moses...” (Rom. 5:13-14)*

Paul reinforces his previous statement by saying that even in an era without law, sin still caused death—even without law, there was guilt.

- **Inherited Corruption<sup>9</sup> (“original pollution”)**

*“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9)*

*“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” (Ps. 51:5)*

*“Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” (Eph. 2:3)*

- **Our inherited corruption has 2 implications;**

- **For our nature-**

- We are not just good people who occasionally do bad things. We are sinful people in our nature—

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 494

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 496

meaning we cannot honor God in our intellect, emotions or volition without Christ.

- For our actions-
  - While we may do good deeds horizontally, we cannot do any good vertically. All of our righteousness is as filthy rags (Is. 64:6)

## “You Shall be Holy, For I Am Holy”

Now that we have laid the groundwork of who we are before coming to Christ, theologically speaking, how then do we change so that we might be holy like God has called us to be (1 Pet. 1:16)?

### 1. Regeneration- (Rom. 6:1-11)

- As we’ve already mentioned our pre-Christ position of being slaves to sin, we must recognize that we are no longer slaves to sin after conversion

*“knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died has been freed from sin.” (Rom. 6:6-7)*

*“Even so consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 6:11)*

### 2. Faith- (Heb. 3:12-4:2)

*“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for” (Heb. 11:1).*

*“For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as [the Israelites] also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.” (Heb. 4:2)*

### 3. The Holy Spirit- (Rom. 8:1-17)

- It is by the Spirit that we are changed to the likeness of Christ

*“for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” (Rom. 8:13)*

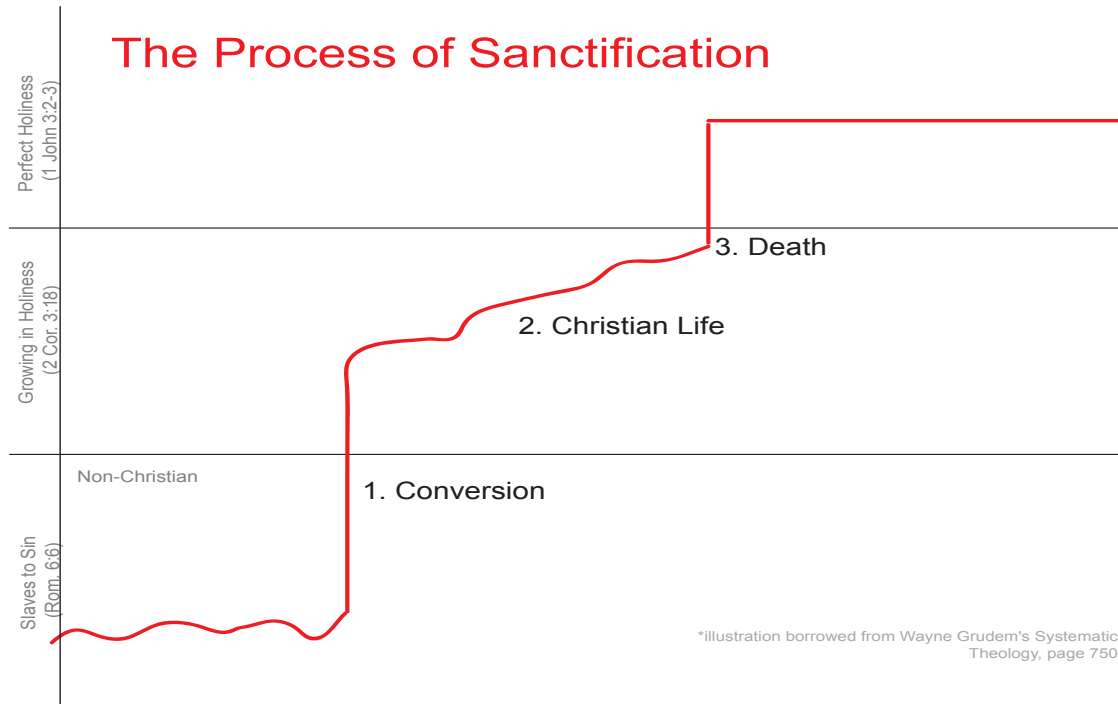
## “The Need for Humility”

Scripturally speaking then, the process of change in Christians is both passive and active. It is active in the sense that we pursue disciplines to achieve Christ-likeness. However, it is primarily passive in that it is Christ who works in us. It is as Paul says in Phil. 2.;

*“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:12-13)*

God calls us to work our salvation; to strive for moral excellence (see vs. 14-16). But

we don't do this on our own. It is God who works in us. As Jerry Bridges says, we are in a state of "dependent responsibility".<sup>10</sup> Below is a graph to show what this process looks like.



<sup>10</sup> Bridges, Jerry and Bob Bevington, *The Bookends of the Christian Life*; Crossway Books ©2001, p. 95

# Biblical Disciplines

We spent the last section reviewing how we change. We did this by primarily looking at the theology behind change in believers; who we were before Christ and how we change subsequent to our conversion. Now, we turn to the question of how we initiate change in our life. How is it that you and I can put on Christ-likeness? Practically speaking, what can we do to yield to the Holy Spirit's ability to make us more like His Son?

## Part 1- "Accurately Handling the Word of Truth" (2 Tim. 2:15)

We know that God's Word is central to Christian living. This is emphasized throughout God's Word;

*"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."* (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

*"Sanctify them in the truth, Your word is truth."* (John 17:17)

We also know that the Holy Spirit has inspired the written Word;

*"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."* (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."* (John 14:26)

*"When the Helper comes whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about me, and you will testify also, because you have been with me from the beginning."* (John 15:26-27)

*"for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."* (2 Pet. 1:21)

We also know that the Holy Spirit is a primary agent in our change of behavior;

*"for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live"* (Rom. 8:13)

*"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."* (Gal. 5:16)

This then is why the Bible is central to Christian living; because the Spirit who inspired it is the same Spirit who we rely upon to change us. With the Word, there will not be change.

## A Closer Look

If we go back to the passage in 2 Timothy 3, we find some very telling characteristics of God's Word;

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;” (2 Tim. 3:16)<sup>11</sup>

According to this verse, Scripture finds itself useful in the following ways;

1. **Teaching-** (διδασκαλία- “teaching”<sup>12</sup>) As we have already seen, we are in need of teaching because it is contrary to our nature (1 Cor. 2:14). On our own, we do not understand the things of the Spirit.
2. **Reproof-** (ἐλεγμός- “conviction”) Jesus promised us that the Holy Spirit would convict of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). Hearing the Word brings conviction of sin.
3. **Correction-** (ἐπανόρθωσις- “restoration to an upright state”) God’s Word doesn’t just convict and leave us in sin, it shows us how to live rightly. Restoration is only possible through God’s Word.)
4. **Training-** (παιδεία- “the whole training and education of children”) The formation of new discipline; re-education. The Bible is our center for forming new, God-honoring disciplines.
  - a. “when Paul writes that the Scripture is ‘profitable for teaching’ and ‘for training in righteousness,’ he is describing positive or formative discipline. Formative discipline refers to how Scripture shapes and molds the Christian as he or she imbibes its teaching and is trained to live for God...Christians are shaped by the Word of God... Likewise, when Paul referse to the Scriptures as profitable ‘for reproof, for correction’ his describing how the Word of God confronts us and turns us away from error to righteousness. This is corrective discipline.”<sup>13</sup>

But what are the fruits of disciplining ourselves in Scripture?

“so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:17)

- “Adequate” (ἄρτιος- “fitted, complete, perfect)- this term is stated in the subjunctive mood; the mood of possibility. It is also stated in the present tense. We have all we need to live perfectly.
- “equipped” (εξηρτισμενος- “to make ready for service, equip, furnish<sup>14</sup>”) Stated in the perfect tense, this verb signifies something that happened in the past but has ramifications for the future.
  - ***We have been equipped through God’s word in the past to live presently perfect lives***

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<sup>11</sup> For an interesting discussion on 2 Tim. 3:16-17 see Adams, Jay *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, pgs. 93-95

<sup>12</sup> all definitions taken from <http://www.studylight.org>

<sup>13</sup> Anyabwile, Thabiti M., *What Is a Healthy Church Member?*, (Crossway, 2008), pgs. 75-76

<sup>14</sup> BDAG, ἐξαρτιζω

## Connection to Leading Worship Music

While Scripture is central to our own growth as believers, we must also recognize its centrality to our worship.

*“Let the Word of Christ dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16)*

According to Paul, one of the first steps to corporate worship is personal discipline in the Word. You cannot worship what you do not know. Imagine if you were to sing a song to your wife, and speak of her long blond hair when she has brown—it really wouldn't be honoring to her. In the same way, if we

## Part Two- “The Prayer of a Righteous Man is Powerful and Effective” (Jms. 5:16)

Our culture today is obsessed with the phenomenal. That is to say, we love the paranormal, things which have no scientific explanation. Such things remind us that this place in which we live is unexplainable; made by a Creator that is far more knowledgeable than we are.

In this way, prayer is not an uncommon thing to speak of, no matter what your religious background. Prayer seems to be understood as a way to manipulate the future; the genie in a bottle that commands your every wish.

But how does the Bible describe the discipline of prayer? What should we expect when we pray? Why does a sovereign God call us to pray in the first place?

### Prayer’s Foundation in Christ

First of all, we need to address how it is possible for sinners like you and I to approach God in the first place. The author of Hebrews gives us a beautiful answer;

“Therefore, brethren, since *we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus*, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh...” (Heb. 10:19-20)

- We have confidence before the Father because of the work of Christ
- Christ is our mediator

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

“Therefore, *since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession*. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:14-16)

### Forming a Heart of Faith

One reason we are called to pray is that it is an expression of faith. Prayer moves us to understand our dependence on God to accomplish His work. Notice how Jesus calls us to pray;

“Pray, then, in this way: *'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'*” (Mt. 6:9-13)

We should take a moment to dissect this.

- “Our Father who is in heaven”- “The first words of the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Our Father who art in heaven’ (Matt. 6:9) acknowledge our dependence on God as a loving and wise Father and also recognize that He rules over all from his heavenly throne.”<sup>15</sup>
- “Your kingdom come, Your will be done”- Jesus wants us to acknowledge His purposes at the outset of our prayer. Jesus prayer in the garden (“...yet not as I will, but as You will”-Matt. 26:39) is an illustration of how He called us to pray here.
- “Give us this day our daily bread”- we are reliant upon God’s providence. God is the one giving.
- “and forgive us our debts...”- We are also reliant upon God for His forgiveness, not just for our forgiveness but also for the extension of forgiveness of others.
- “deliver us from evil”- Once again, stated passively to draw attention to our inability and God’s provision.

God wants us to pray in such away that we acknowledge our helplessness without Him. God cultivates a heart of faith through a praying tongue.<sup>16</sup>

## Prayer in the Name of Christ

Sometimes Christians have the notion that tagging the line “in Jesus’ name” to the end of our prayers gives them legitimacy. Why does Christ ask us to pray in His name (Jn 14:13-14)?

- It gives us authorization<sup>17</sup>
  - Praying in the name of Jesus gives us the authorization to come in His power and authority. This is seen in the acts of the Disciples (i.e.- Acts 3:6)
- It reminds us of the character of Christ<sup>18</sup>
  - In NT times, someone’s name referred also to their character and perception. Thus, when we pray in Jesus’ name, it should be in line with His character and conduct.

## Prayer and Leading Church Music

With this in mind, we should see the obvious connections between prayer and leading others in musical worship. First, our corporate worship can only be accomplished when those who engage in it have faith in Jesus Christ. Otherwise, we do not have an advocate before the Father and we have no access before His throne.

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<sup>15</sup> Grudem, 376

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that there is a reciprocal relationship between prayer and faith. That is to say that prayer expresses faith and faith brings about prayer. We see then that this is a matter of the chicken or the egg coming first; God calls us to exercise both and both will be increased.

<sup>17</sup> Grudem, 379

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 379

Second, we know that prayer is the expression of the heart of faith. Thus, as a worship leader you are responsible to rely on God's work, not your own, to minister to the church. There is no set of music that can be planned well enough to minister without the Spirit.

Third, our ministry in music should be in the name of Christ. That is to say, in line with His character and spoken in His authority. If our worship is in line with His character it will be meek; not exalting self but seeking to exalt Christ. At the same time, however, if it is done in the name of Christ it will be done in the confidence His authority brings. We should not shy away from proclaiming biblical truth but should also avoid the arrogance and pride that would not emulate the character of Christ.

## Part three: “Put off...Put on” (Eph. 4:22-24)

In their book *The Bookends of the Christian Life*, Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington point out the typical misunderstanding that we have about holy living:

“For many years the two of us thought that the mind was the best weapon against the sins of the heart. We attempted to use our knowledge of ‘what I should do’ to fight our sinful desire of ‘what I want to do’. We assumed that if the argument of our mind prevailed, we would do the right thing...However, this approach resulted in very limited success.”<sup>19</sup>

So then, nearly as important as what we do is how we try to accomplish it. Too many times we try to accomplish this of our own strength or knowledge. But God calls us to accomplish this by His power, particularly in His Spirit;

“if we live by the spirit, *let us walk by the Spirit*. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.” (Gal. 5:25-26)

“So then brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; *but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live*” (Rom. 8:12-13)

In essence, this was also the problem Paul was addressing in Galatia. In chapter 3, Paul asks “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3). But the phrase Paul uses later in Galatians (also cited above), “walk by the Spirit”, seems very cryptic. How can we truly understand what he means by this? Lets take a deeper look at Galatians 5;

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now *those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh* with its passions and desires. If we *live by the Spirit*, let us also walk by the Spirit.” (Gal. 5:24-25)

In order for us to walk in the Spirit, Paul tells us two things must happen.

- **We must crucify the flesh-** This is just like Paul’s words in Rom. 6:11— “consider yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Jesus Christ.” In Christ, the power of the flesh no longer holds sway over us. Rather, we are now free to live according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4).
- **We must be made alive by the Spirit-** this is to say, if you are made alive by the Spirit than walk by Him. Paul follows an indicative with an imperative<sup>20</sup>, telling us, as Ryken says, to “become who we are”. We already are made alive in the Spirit, if we are in Christ, therefore we must walk in the Spirit.

Perhaps another Pauline reference will help;

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<sup>19</sup> Bridges, p. 113

<sup>20</sup> Ryken, Philip Graham, *Galatians*; R&R Publishing ©2005; p. 239

“that in reference to your former manner of life, *you lay aside the old self*, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and *put on the new self*, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” – Eph. 4:22-24)

Here, Paul calls us to *put off* the old self, and to *put on* the new self—righteousness and holiness of the truth. In some way, Paul is calling us to deal with sin by putting on its opposite, God’s character. Look at how the passage continues;

“Therefore, *laying aside falsehood*, *SPEAK TRUTH* EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.”

Paul doesn’t merely call us to set aside lying, he calls us to put on truth in its place. And the passage continues in this light—don’t steal but contribute (v. 28), don’t speak in an unwholesome manner but let your words be beneficial (v. 29), etc.<sup>21</sup>

Paul’s point is not that we should just work at replacing activities with more positive activities, but rather that we should work at replacing the things we love. As He states in Colossians 3:1, we need to be seeking things above, “where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God”. Walking in the Spirit, then, is a matter of replacing the fleshly things we love by loving the things God does.

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<sup>21</sup> For a more full discussion (which I have obviously borrowed from) see Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, p. 171-190

## Part Four: “When You Fast...” (Mat. 6:16-18)

It would be easy for us, in our 21<sup>st</sup> century mindset to write-off fasting as antiquated—perhaps great for the soul of the Old Testament prophet but not of much value to the New Testament worshipper. Or perhaps our attitude is one of fear. Certainly there is a lot of unknowns when you deny yourself food for the first time.

Regardless, we can be sure that God has called His people to fast. This seems to be Christ’s intention in Matthew 6:16-18;

“Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

*“When you fast...”*

First, we must notice that our Lord does not speak in a fashion that should make us think fasting to be optional. He does not say “*if you fast*” but “*when you fast*”.

Contextually, Jesus has in mind the attitude with which one should fast. It is notable that Jesus seems to be calling for the same attitude in fasting as he does in giving (v. 2,5), namely that the heart should not be seeking the praise of others but seek to be seen by the Father (v. 18).

This seems to be a running theme with the concept of fasting—to draw God’s notice to a particular item of importance. Consider Isaiah 58.

"Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their transgression And to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways, As a nation that has done righteousness And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me {for} just decisions, They delight in the nearness of God. Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like {you do} today to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD? "Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, And if you give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness And your gloom {will become} like midday. And the LORD will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. Those from among you will

rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, The restorer of the streets in which to dwell.” (Is. 58:1-12)<sup>22</sup>

It is from these verses that we may need to draw out some implications

### Calling and Not Hearing (v. 1-4)

It becomes obvious within the opening verses of this chapter of Isaiah that the Israelites are being frustrated by religious rites that are producing no visible fruit. “Why have we fasted and You do not see?” (v. 2). The Lord describes these people as follows; “they seek me by day and by night” (v. 2), they “delight to know my ways” (v. 2), in their eyes they have “done righteousness and [have] not forsaken the ordinance of their God” (v. 2). These Israelites are described as delighting in the nearness of God (v. 2). And yet verse 3 describes their subsequent frustration. Why?

Verses 3 and 4 seems to be provide the answer. “Behold, on the day of your fast you find {your} desire, And drive hard all your workers. Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist...”. The issue with Israel’s fast was that it was just religious and not spiritual.

Let the worshipper take heed. It is within our fallen nature to seek a form of godliness but deny its power (2 Tim. 3:5). This is to say, we love to put on the outward appearance of righteousness without the inward obedience of heart. Such is the case in Isaiah 58. The Israelites desired *nearness* to God but not *likeness* to Him in their character. Proximity to God without change in practice is not possible (Lev. 10:1-3).

### True and False Fasting (v. 4b-7)

As John Piper points out, “The ethical, practical, relational, accompaniments of fasting—or worship in general—are the real test of the authenticity of the fasting and the worship. Monday is the proof of Sunday”.<sup>23</sup> This is to say that the point of this next section of Isaiah is that genuine fasting should have produced different action in the Israelites—namely to “loose the bonds of wickedness”, “undo the bands of the yoke”, and “let the oppressed go free”. The irony here is that God is pointing to individuals who would starve themselves in fasting while also starving those around them with a closed-hand mentality. If their fasting was real, others around them would eat more freely.

### The Product of Genuine Fasting (v. 8-12)

But why should we fast? God seems to give us 3 different reasons in this text;

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<sup>22</sup> For a wonderful treatment on this passage see Piper’s “A Fast for Waters That Do Not Fail, parts 1 and 2”, ([http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/26\\_Fasting/902\\_A\\_Fast\\_for\\_Waters\\_That\\_Do\\_Not\\_Fail\\_Part\\_1/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/26_Fasting/902_A_Fast_for_Waters_That_Do_Not_Fail_Part_1/)) ([http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1995/903\\_A\\_Fast\\_for\\_Waters\\_That\\_Do\\_Not\\_Fail\\_Part\\_2/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1995/903_A_Fast_for_Waters_That_Do_Not_Fail_Part_2/))

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5

**1. Our darkness becomes light (v. 8-10)**

Practically speaking, what was formerly marked as sin will become righteousness. Note v. 9 “If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness”.

**2. We will be continually Guided (v. 11)**

We will not only be like “watered gardens” but “like a spring of water whose waters do not fail”. Such are those who are guided by the LORD. Paradoxically, if we are constantly being poured out, we will be full.

**3. We will also be able to help restore those around us (v. 12)**

Such action will not only benefit us but also those around us. So that we are recognized with a restorative nature.

### Connection To Leading Worship Music

If we are not careful, our service to the body of Christ can become very self-reliant. We may start to understand our job as an issue of mere responsibility—*we choose the music, we perform the songs, we set the atmosphere*. The discipline of fasting is meant that we would starve the flesh to feed the spirit. This is to say, we must recognize a humble reliance upon God to work through our music ministry and not be so short-sighted to merely see a successful worship service as a series of well executed songs and a well planned service.

## Session #4- Your Spiritual Life and Corporate Worship

“Little Children, guard yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). Initially, this would seem to be a very strange way for John to close his letter. There are no closing greetings or final salutations, just an imperative asking his readers to not bow down in idolatry.

Obviously, John had something more in mind here than statues and incense, and actually the issue of idolatry is far more pervasive in scripture than we might realize. Issues of idolatry are easy to find in the Old Testament as Israel was constantly distracted by other gods who did not satisfy like the true God. But even here in the Old Testament passages like Ezekiel 14, Israel’s issue are “idols of the heart” (Ez. 14:4, 5, 7).

Paul speaks in terms of the “desires” or “lusts” (ἐπιθυμίᾳ).<sup>24</sup> “Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22). He even speaks in terms of sinful behavior as idolatry (Col. 3:5).

Scripturally speaking, then, all sin is idolatry. This, of course, has major implications for the Music Leader. As we see obedience and disobedience in this light we also recognize this to be characterized by worship—either worship of self in disobedience to God’s law or worship of God as obedience.

### Products of Piety for the Music Leader

- **It confirms your relationship with Christ-** John told us that he wrote his first epistle so that his readers may know that they have eternal life (1 Jn. 5:13). This epistle centered upon certain factors that showed whether or not you were a believer; love for your brother, obedience to the commandments, confession of Christ, etc. In fact, a great deal of scripture points to assurance of genuine conversion in mark of obedience:

*“for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” (Rom. 8:13)*

*“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.” (John 15:8)*

- **It frees us to worship Him-** This would seem obvious; if we obey God we relate to Him with the obstruction of sin. David describes the state of sin like his body was wasting away, that he was groaning all day long, that God’s

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<sup>24</sup> Powlison, David, *Idols of the Heart and “Vanity Fair”*, *Journal of Biblical Counseling*; Winter 1995, p. 36

hand was heavy upon him, and that his strength was spent (Ps. 32:3-4). And notice David's response when that sin is forgiven—"You surround me with songs of deliverance" (v.7). There is no doubt that personal holiness and delight are tied together.

- **It gives confidence to lead pastorally-** We will hit more on this in section #3, but the role of the music leader is pastoral in nature. You shepherd people through music. As such, we are called to watch our life and doctrine closely (1 Tim. 4:16) because "as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those hear you." As we watch our lives, we have confidence that we are leading our people to salvation. This is the positive side of this commandment—you have confidence because of your right relation to the Father in obedience. Negatively, when we fail to be obedient as music leaders, the consequences are drastic and have led to many church splits, fractured relationships, and shipwrecked lives.
- **It is, itself, worship-** Jesus said that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments (Jn. 14:15). Our obedience is an expression of our love. Too many people want to express love to Christ with their tongues and not with their actions. Such a disconnect, as much as possible, should be avoided in our lives so that our expression of worship can be truly heartfelt and not divided with our love of the world.

## Session #5- The Theological Sphere

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”  
(Col. 3:16)

I often find it surprising that Paul so clearly links singing and instruction here in Colossians 3. Paul is not merely saying that our music should be informed by scripture, which is true, but also that our music is a means by which *we inform others*. Thus, a scripturally misinformed service isn't really a service at all in the sense that it is not an aid to those who attend. We discussed 1 Tim. 4:16, but have not paid much attention to its second element; “pay close attention to yourself *and your teaching*”.

This section is designed not so much to tell you what to believe but rather to show the centrality of scripture in the task of leading others in music.

### “Good” Theology...

As evangelicals, we often make the mistake of understanding “good” theology to merely be cohesive—that is to say, consistent. So long as a statement about the nature of God “adds up” so to speak, we rarely take issue with it. J. Gresham Machen brought this out most clearly in his *Christianity and Liberalism*, saying that the form of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Christianity was really not Christianity at all. In the end, he and his opponents were speaking of two different saviors—both of which were named Jesus, but varied significantly in character and purpose.

In the same way, how we think of Jesus need not only be intellectually consistent. While the following list is not comprehensive, it gives us a good list of criteria by which we can assess the viability of someone's theological claim. Good theology is scripturally defined and glory-driven.

### **...Is Scripturally Defined**

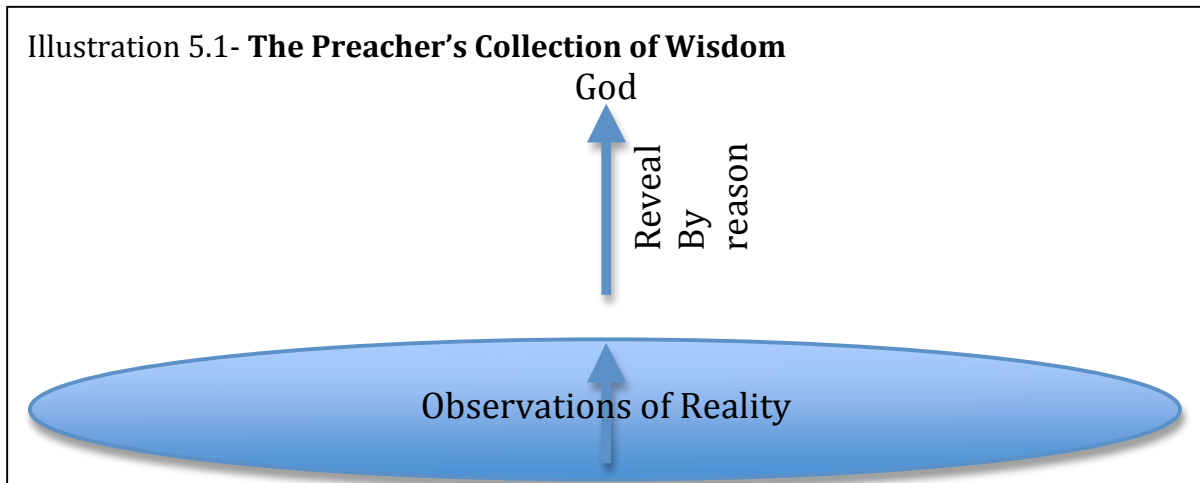
As we know, all scripture is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16), that is to say, it is *inspired* by God Himself. So, in the Bible we have God's words about Himself. As it is inspired it is also *useful*; for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness.

We also know that we are naturally enemies to God, not submitting to His law or even able to do so (Rom. 8:7). As such there is no one who understands (Rom. 3:11), no one who seeks after God.

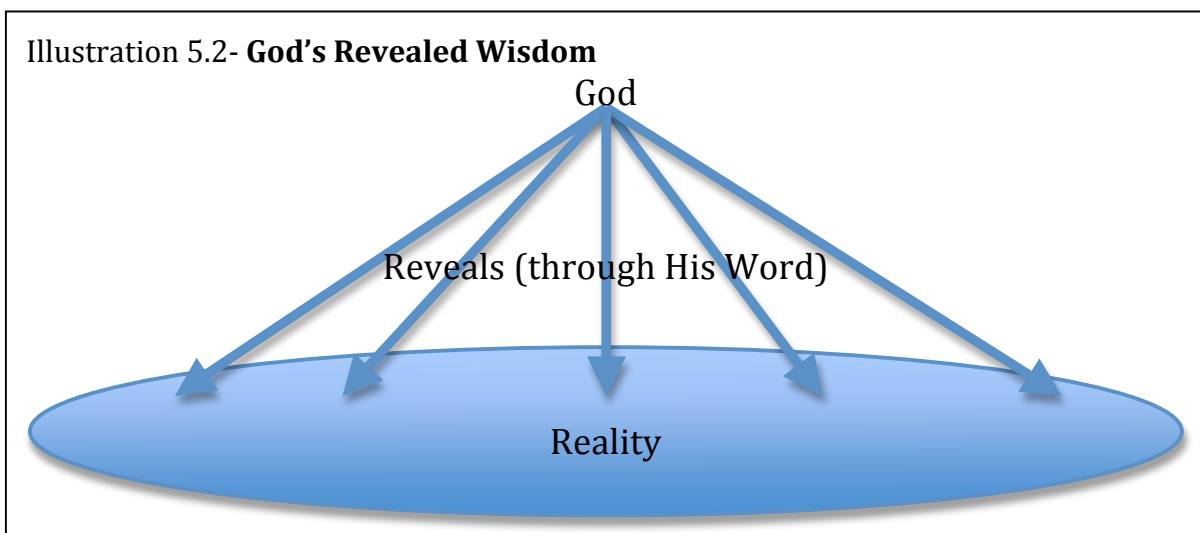
As we are fallen, we need God's Spirit to illumine His word so that we can understand God's nature and character. The more we lean upon unaided human reason, the more wrong we will be in our conclusions about who God is.

The best example of this is that of the book of Ecclesiastes. The Preacher has developed a view of life that is defined by disappointment because God has made it to be so. God has plans that He will not show us (Ec. 3:11), He has given wealth that cannot be enjoyed (Ec. 6:1-2), and He controls all things so that man has no idea what awaits Him (Ec. 9:1-2). Yet, this entire book is based upon what the Preacher saw or understood (1:13,17; 2:3,11, 12; 4:1; 5:18 7:25).

While the Preacher sought to collect data and make conclusions about who God is, we are called to do the opposite; listen to God and make assertions about our world. The two could barely be more different.



As you can see in the illustration above (illustration 5.1), the Preacher collected observations from the world around him and, by the means of his own reason, sought to reveal the character of God. It should be no surprise then that he sees such indifference in God (Ecc. 1:13; 3:11; 6:1-2) and such vanity in life (Ecc. 1:2).



God has shown us, however, that by faith we trust what He reveals through His Word (illustration 5.2). And just as God spoke the creation into being, He does not speak anything that is not actual—God’s Word does not describe reality, it defines it.

### **...and Glory-Driven**

The works of Jonathan Edwards and John Piper have driven the heart of modern day evangelicals to this reflection—God works all things for His glory. Therefore, anything that is stated about God, that is theological, should not push this universal principle aside.

“That God is praiseworthy, that we ought to praise him, that we will praise him—these are common truths among Christians, and we affirm them gladly. But less often do we hear the truth that the praise of God's glory is not merely the result of his action but also the goal and purpose of that action. He governs the world precisely to the end that he might be admired, marveled at, exalted, and praised. Christ is coming, Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 1:10, at the end of this age, ‘to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at by all who believe.’”<sup>25</sup>

But what does Scripture say that drives us to this conclusion?

"For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another. (Is. 48:11)

'For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me,' declares the LORD, 'that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise and for glory; but they did not listen.' (Jer. 13:11)

"You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me" (Ex. 20:3-5)

"But I withdrew My hand and *acted for the sake of My name*, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out." (Ez. 20:22)

But, what about the New Testament?

"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name " Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." (Jhn. 12:27-28)

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, *and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*" (Matt. 5:16)

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God

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<sup>25</sup> Piper, John; "Is God For Us Or Himself"- sermon, found at [http://desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/3/242\\_Is\\_God\\_for\\_Us\\_or\\_for\\_Himself/](http://desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/3/242_Is_God_for_Us_or_for_Himself/)

and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, *to the praise of the glory of His grace*, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” (Eph. 1:2-6)

There are many more passages which show God’s concern first and foremost for His glory. The more we study scripture, the more this emphasis will become clear in what we read.<sup>26</sup>

There is much more to say on guidelines toward developing good theology. However, I either do not know them yet, don’t have enough confidence to write them here or, don’t have the space to write them. I would greatly encourage you as a worship leader to be “theological”. We will see the benefits of this for your ministry in the next section, but you will see the benefits in your soul.

## Theology And Doxology

As good theology is scripturally defined, we would do well to comment on a scriptural relationship between Doxology and Theology. Overwhelmingly, the pattern provided in God’s Word shows us that good theology moves our hearts to Doxology—stated differently, our understanding of who God is moves our hearts to praise Him. On the whole, worship without meaning is simply emotionalism and as such will be short lived. But worship which begins with understanding is in some sense, complete. C.S. Lewis draws this out;

“But the most obvious fact about praise—whether of God or anything—strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise... the world rings with praise—lovers praise their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game...

My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can’t help doing, about everything else we value.

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.”<sup>27</sup>

If we enjoy it, we glory in it. If we glory in it, we express it. This must begin with the understanding and move to the affections. Let us sort out a few scriptural examples to establish the point

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<sup>26</sup> For more on this see John Piper’s *Desiring God*—Appendix 1 entitled “The Goal of God in Redemptive History”. Piper has great resources on how God is not egocentric in His pursuit of glory.

<sup>27</sup> Quote taken from Piper’s *Desiring God* (p. 18)—original quote: Lewis, C.S., *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brance and World, 1958), pp. 94-95

## Pauline Theology and Doxology

It is commonly understood that most of Paul's letters divide into two main sections: teaching and practice. The Book of Romans, for example splits into a primary teaching on justification by faith (Rom. 1-11) and the practices that should flow out of that (Rom. 12-16). Ephesians also begins with three theologically packed chapters but ultimately returns to three practically oriented chapters.

This point is made most clearly in Romans. As we've already stated, Romans 1-11 draws out a theological understanding. But this section finds its climax in 11:33-36 where Paul breaks into a section of praise in regard to God's unsurpassed wisdom and knowledge. In viewing God's provision for mankind in Christ (chapters 1-5), His call to Holiness in the Spirit (chapters 6-8) and The Father's sovereign call upon His elect, Paul finds God's wisdom "unsearchable". This is not new content to be learned but delight in what has already been stated.

While many of Paul's letters may not bear this theology/doxology trend in their overall structure, many do within individual passages. Ephesians 1 shows this very clearly. In describing the role of each member of the trinity in our salvation (v. 3-14), Paul begins with praise—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

Or perhaps the conclusion of Paul's first letter to Timothy: "...He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. *To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.*" (1 Tim. 6:15-16).

It is also worth noting that Paul often praises in response to the progress he sees in the gospel. This is most clearly noted in the introductions to many of his letters (1 Cor. 1:4; Rom. 1:8; Eph. 1:15-16; Phil. 1:3-5; 1 Ths. 1:2-4; etc).

## Theology and Doxology in the Psalms

The Psalm also draw out the link between what we know about God and our proper response. Consider Psalm 33:

Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones; Praise is becoming to the upright. Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy. (Ps. 33:1-3)

For the word of the LORD is upright, and all His work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. (Ps. 33:4-6)

Clearly, verses 1-3 focus on the response to what is stated in verse 4-6. We do music *because of* what is stated in verses 4-6. This is an appropriate response to what we know of God.

Or consider Psalm 100;

- 1 Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.
- 2 Serve the LORD with gladness;  
Come before Him with joyful singing.
- 3 Know that the LORD Himself is God;  
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;  
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
- 4 Enter His gates with thanksgiving  
And His courts with praise  
Give thanks to Him, bless His name.
- 5 For the LORD is good;  
His lovingkindness is everlasting  
And His faithfulness to all generations.

The call to worship in verses 1 and 2 (“shout” in v. 1, “serve” and “come” in v. 2) is given meaning in v. 3 (“know that the Lord Himself is God”). Again, the same structure is used in verse 4 and 5—we give “thanks” and “praise” because (“for”) “..the Lord is good”.

### **Other Genres?**

While I’m sure that we might likely find this theology/doxology link in the Gospels, OT Narrative, and other places in scripture we know that it is well established in these two specific examples. Perhaps if there were more time and space here, we could delve into various genres in scripture and find the principle at work in texts like Matt. 11:27 or Rev. 4:1-8, etc. When we see God as He is, our natural response is worshipful (Lev. 9:24).

## Section #6- The Theological Sphere and Corporate Worship

There is no doubt that good theology is missing from most of what we currently understand to be contemporary worship. To the degree that this exists, the people of God are left without substance to fuel a genuinely worshipful response. Anything less only provides an emotionalized, temporary experience and falls short of the life-change-effecting musical worship that we seek for our participants.

This being said, we should also recognize that the bar for what might be “theological” will vary throughout your service to your congregation. Certain contexts will be moved by the phrase “God is big”, while others will seek a robust doctrine of penal substitution. It is the task of the music leader to present all of God’s truth in such a way that engages more than the mind, but the heart and hands of congregants as well.

### How Firm A Foundation: Building Church Music from an Understanding of the Gospel

Just as Jesus is both the sacrifice and the priest, so the gospel is both the means and focus of corporate worship—that is to say, the Godhead’s work in the gospel is our central focus and we are capable of such worship only through the access we have in Christ.

It is vitally important for us to plan our services with the gospel at the center as this is ultimately the point of scripture—we see Jesus’ work in every page. From the need created in Gen. 3 to the Lamb’s book of life in Revelation 21, God’s purpose is to show us Jesus (Lk. 24:44), and when we see Jesus, we see the gospel.

Additionally, if the gospel is not the center of what determines what songs we do and how we do them, we open ourselves up to a host of motivations that could easily run our worship services. Bryan Chappel says it this way;

“If gospel priorities do not determine worship choices, then people’s preferences will tear the church apart. The variety of style possibilities combined with the usual mix of personalities, generations, newcomers and old-timers will put church leaders under constant pressure to adjust worship. If personal preferences are allowed to call the shots, then worship tensions will be unavoidable.”<sup>28</sup>

In light of this, here are 5 basic tenets to consider when planning corporate worship;

#### **1. The Message and It’s Container-**

Bryan Chappel’s *Christ-Centered Worship* hammers home the point that our

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<sup>28</sup> Chapell, Bryan, *Christ-Centered Worship*, ©2009, Baker Academic, pg. 130.

liturgy (how we order our service) reflects our message. In reviewing varying liturgies throughout church history, Chapell concludes the following;

“The reason this liturgy became so common, however, cannot simply be explained by cultural currents. The liturgy did not merely form the pattern for gospel worship; the gospel formed the liturgy. Where the gospel was truly understood and rightly held, this patten of worship naturally unfolded—not simply because English culture held way, but because the gospel forms the best container for its expression. A milk carton differs from an egg carton because the contents determine the structure of their container. So also the content of the gospel forms the worship that best expresses it. The commonality of the Westminster traditions is more attributable to its conformity to the contours of the gospel than to the power of any culture or church to determine a universal style of worship.”<sup>29</sup>

Here are the basic elements that Chapell concludes should be in every worship service;

1. Adoration (recognition of God’s greatness and grace)
2. Confession (acknowledgement of our sin and need for grace)
3. Assurance (affirmation of God’s provision of grace)
4. Thanksgiving (expression of praise and thanks for God’s grace)
5. Petition and Intercession (expression of dependence on God’s grace)
6. Instruction (acquiring the knowledge to grow in grace)
7. Communion/Fellowship (celebrating the grace of union with Christ and his people)
8. Charge and Blessing (living for and in the light of God’s grace)<sup>30</sup>

While I’m not sure of the legitimacy of these categories (as you read the book, the connections Chapel makes between some scripture passages and his 8-fold layout is sometimes a stretch), I do agree that our services need to match the gospel we teach.

	Isaiah 6 (Isaiah)	Deut. 5 (Sinai)	2 Ch. 5-7 (Solomon)
Adoration	6:1-4	5:4, 22-24	5:1-5
Confession	6:5	5:5, 25-27	5:6-10
Assurance	6:6-7	5:2-3, 6	5:11-13
Thanksgiving	6:7	v. 27	6:1-11
Petition	6:8		6:12-21
Instruction	6:9-12	5:6-21, 32-33a	6:22-42
Communion			7:4-9
Blessing	6:13	5:33b	7:10

But what of the New Testament? Chapell writes;

“The scarcity of liturgical mandates in the New Testament cannot reflect the writers’ lack of concern for rightly worshipping God. Too many give their lives for His glory. Instead, the lack of explicit detail must reflect an intention to guide us by transcendent principles rather than by specific worship forms that could become culture-bound, time-locked, and superstition-invoking.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Chapell, Bryan, *Christ-Centered Worship*; ©2009, Baker Academic, p. 68

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 85-97

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 108

## **2. Beholding Glory for Life-Change**

The first few chapters of 2 Corinthians center on Paul's validation as a minister. In 3:1 he writes "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?" From this, we can see that Paul's authority was obviously in question. But Paul answers in a typical Pauline fashion—"you are our letter" (2 Cor. 3:2). Paul's validation as a minister was the changed lives of those he ministers to. But how does this happen?

Specifically, in 2 Cor. 3, Paul tells us this happens in a new way, with the gospel and not the law. This all comes to climax in v. 18;

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord the Spirit."

As Paul sees it, how does transformation happen? When we behold God's glory. As we behold His glory, we are transformed. John also gives us a similar thought;

"...We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."  
(1 John 3:2)

Paul gives us even greater clarity in 2 Cor. 4;

"For God who said 'light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6)

We behold God's glory in Christ. So then, it stands to reason that if we are actively showing our congregation Jesus, they are beholding God's glory (cf. John 14:9). As they behold His glory they are transformed into "the same image" (2 Cor. 3:18).

## **3. Our Need for a Mediator**

We've mentioned this before, however, it is worth reiterating here. As we look at the role of theology in leading worship, we should always recognize that our only confidence in worship is our mediator's blood (Heb. 10:19).

As such, our music should always contain this message on some level. Or people need to be reminded *daily* that, though they fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23) in their sin, there is hope to be justified by faith in Christ (Rom. 3:24).