

The Worship Leader

by Benjamin Sealey

The position of a worship leader is first and foremost as a servant. The worship leader serves the people into the presence of God.

What does it mean to serve people? To genuinely serve people, your focus should not be the people, but God. There is a very subtle trap in ministry, which says that to serve people; you have to listen to their desires, concerns, and so on. True ministry does not work this way. True ministry is completely God focused, because it is only when you are focused upon Him will you have true perspective. To truly serve people is to give them what God has for them, and to lead them to the point where they can hear and operate in God for themselves. When the Israelites were led through the desert, only Moses was listening to God. The desires of the people were to go back into slavery, where they felt they would be better off. Moses, however, was listening to God, and he truly served the people by not reacting to their opinions, but to what God had said to him.

The worship leader has to know the way into God's presence better than anyone else. This means that being a worship leader is not a Sunday job; it is an every day job. A worship leader trains every day by seeking God and spending time in His presence, worshipping and glorifying Him. When it is time to lead others to that same place, the way is easy, because the worship leader already knows what God is doing, what He is saying and what He is releasing. An obvious analogy is a mountain. The worship leader's role is to lead people up the mountain. He can only do this if he knows the way up the mountain better than anyone else. In the last few years, God has had me climbing up the hills and mountains of Cheshire and North Wales, so that I know the way up those places better than anyone. I spend time at the top worshipping, but it is in the climbing of the mountain that I get real revelation, and that I get my training.

A worship leader has to be put aside for God alone; he is to be the virgin bride that God is longing for in His people. Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? Only he who has clean hands and a pure heart.

What about the musical skills of a worship leader? Firstly, to worship God you do not need to be a musician. Some of the most anointed worshipers I know can't sing or play a note. I have had worshipers in the worship team who are completely devoid of musical skill, the reason I have had them in the team is because their hearts were so right before God, that they could lead worship by simply speaking or crying out to God. I would rather be led into worship by a tone deaf person who knows and loves their God than by the best musician in the world who has the wrong heart. I am constantly meeting people who think that they cannot worship because they cannot sing. Let me set the record straight - worship and music are not necessarily the same thing. I have heard good music in church that mentions Jesus, but had nothing to do with worship. I have also heard some of the most anointed worship coming from the mouth of someone shouting out their praise to God.

Why then do we use music in our worship? Music is used simply as an expression of what is in our hearts. One of the reasons that the heart of a worshiper is so important is that it is expressed in the music he might play. A heart full of worship to his God, will express that worship as the worship leader plays. Music is used in worship leading because it has an ability to create a corporate anointing that other expressions of worship (such as dance, words etc.) can not do in the same way. A worship leader can create true worship, and lead others in the direction that he is going by using music as a tool to set the direction and flow. Music in worship creates a clear direction and anointing in the worship.

If music is used to lead and express our worship, how important is it to be good musicians? Years ago, when I led worship, it was the only time in the week that I actually picked up a musical instrument. Quite frankly, I couldn't be bothered to play in the week. My musical equipment stayed in the church all week, and I picked it up just before the service on a Sunday. I was a talented musician, I knew it, and so I thought that I did not have to practice. After this being my attitude for a number of years, God began to talk to me. He told me that He wanted me to be the best, and the only way that this was going to happen was to practice; and practice hard. I began studying music like I never had before. I spent every night practicing scales and learning theory. I knew that I had to become an absolute master of music, so that music was completely my servant, that I could use and manipulate it to express what the Holy Spirit was doing. I took a diploma in music. When I was studying for this, my teacher told me that I would easily pass the exam. However, I was not satisfied with that. I didn't just want to pass; I wanted to get the highest mark. God had put a determination in me to go beyond the mundane and the average into the best. I passed the exam with a

distinction, purely because I put in the extra hours and the extra effort to get the distinction. It is worthwhile if a worship leader can spend time on different instruments, to understand the effect each one has, and how it can be used to serve the worship. For some practical teaching on music, please see our music lessons section.

A worship leader's responsibility is not to do all the worship leading, but to release others in his team and in the church to worship. He stands with the other members of his time to see them released into what God would have for them. He must also be prepared whilst leading worship to allow worship to flow out of other people, whilst all the time being clear on the direction God is moving, and allowing God to move freely in the service. To sum up in the same we started, a worship leader has to be completely focused and submitted to God.

Copyright © 2006 Benjamin Sealey/JustWorship.com
All rights reserved. Used by permission.