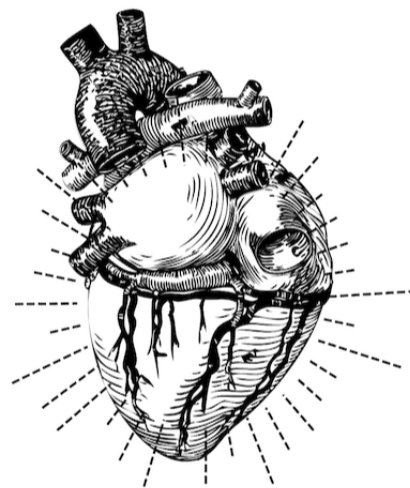
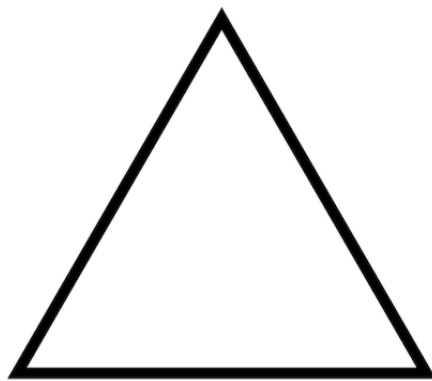
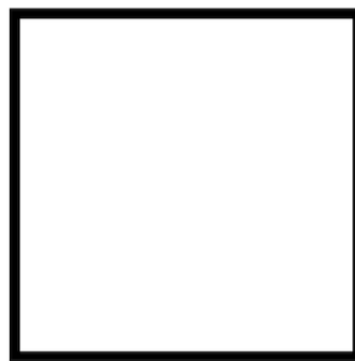
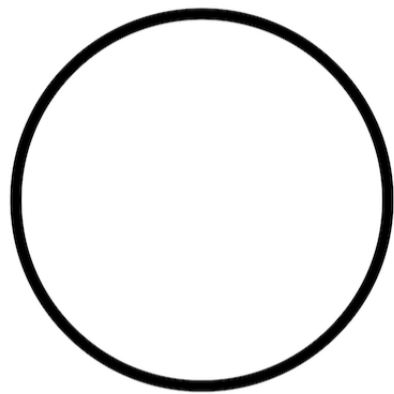


# 4 PILLARS

of an Awesome Worship Leader

**FREE PREVIEW**



FOSTERING A DEEP  
DISCIPLESHIP IN  
CHRIST

STEPHEN TOON



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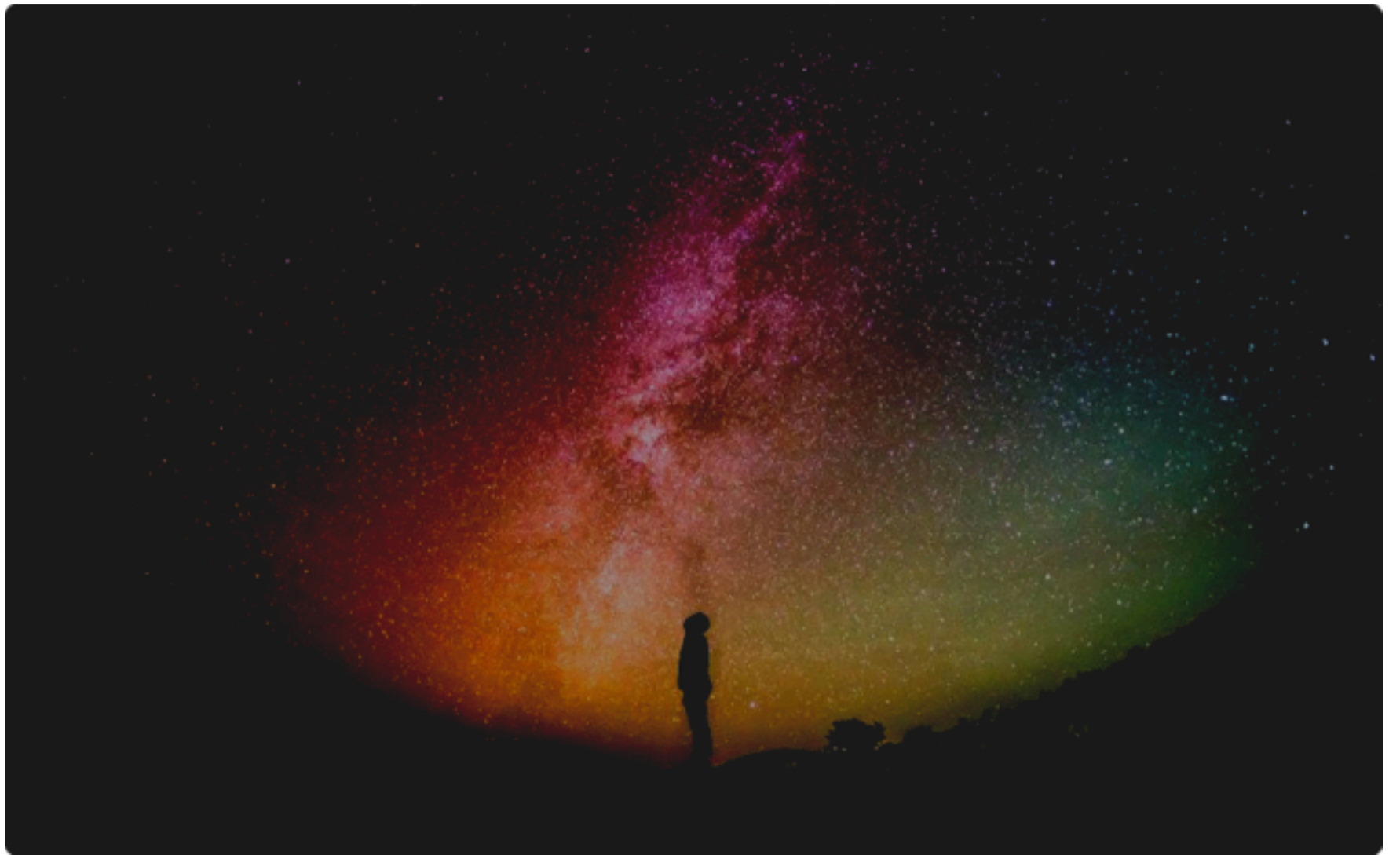
**4 PILLARS of an AWESOME WORSHIP LEADER**  
Fostering a Deep Discipleship in Christ

by Stephen Toon

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Toonmade  
6583 Lakeside Drive  
unit #11  
Oliver, BC V0H 1T4  
CANADA



*for worship leaders: old, young, seasoned and new*

## Introduction

Hello friend! And welcome to Worship Leader Life's first mini eBook adventure: 4 Pillars of an Awesome Worship Leader.

My name is Stephen Toon. I've been a worship leader for over 25 years and a pastor for almost 20 years, ordained with the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church in Canada.

One of the best parts of my job over the last 2 decades? Mentoring Worship leaders for the sole purpose of helping them grow as disciples of Christ. If I'm being honest, I must admit that I owe **you** much gratitude for purchasing this eBook and supporting my work! But what's more important is that you thank yourself for investing in your own work and supporting the call and responsibility that is on your life. I believe you need to hone your craft and develop your God-given gifts and talents. You can do this in so many ways, some of them outlined in this book, but the fact that you're reading this is an excellent indicator of how serious you are about leading worship. My prayer is that this helps you on your journey as a child of God and as a Leader of Worship.

I need to state the obvious, the thing that you need to agree to before we continue. Worship is YOU and YOUR LIFE. Worship can't be relegated to a time or a place or a style or a formula. It just is. Either you ascribe worth to God through your thoughts, choices, words, and deed, or you don't. I'm not saying there is no room for mistakes or failures! To be a disciple of Jesus is to take risks and learn from our mistakes. Need proof? Read the gospels and watch how the disciples responded and behaved! The fantastic news is, we are not alone. In Matthew Chapter 28, Jesus tells us that he is with us ALWAYS!

And we are a part of a GRAND narrative that God Himself has put into place.

Part of that narrative is the revelation that we are FREE to worship intimately, and that we don't worship an abstract idea of a god, we worship the Living and Ever-Present God! In Mark, we read that the curtain in the temple was torn in two when Jesus died, and we see that we have access to the Lord's presence. In Acts we see the Holy Spirit come in power! Not only do we have access, but He has come to be with *us*.

Central to our understanding of worship is our knowledge of The Good News, the Gospel. Jesus teaching and life, death, resurrection, ascension and releasing of his Holy Spirit are at the core of knowing who we are as disciples and worshipers.

# The Gospel

Jesus is God in human form. Fully God and fully man.

He lived and taught among us, showing us how to live and breathe a Kingdom Lifestyle, and basically told us that if we are seeing him, we are seeing the Father. Jesus came to reveal who God is.

Jesus died a horrible death on a cross, and in so doing, He defeated death, sin, and Satan.

Jesus ROSE AGAIN on the third day after he was killed, proving He is Lord over death and life, showing that He really is the author of the common narrative that is told over and over again: there's more to life than meets the eye. Seek, and you shall find, although the journey is deeper than you imagined and there is dark before the dawn.

After showing himself as alive and well, for forty days, he ascended to heaven, indicating that he is reigning over all of this and all of us.

He released his Holy Spirit that we might experience him intimately and all of us at all times-no need to wait in line or travel afar to be touched, healed and taught by our Rabbi and Lord! He is right here with us.

And so, WORSHIP is OUR WHOLE BEING AND LIFE! And it's an ongoing and real relationship with the living God who is right here with you, right now.

## The 4 Pillars of an awesome worship leader?

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I. Worship and Prayer

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II. Honing Your Craft - Study and Practice

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III. Community

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IV. Discipleship

# The 4 Pillars

## I. Worship and Prayer

### 1. WORSHIP

It's kind of a given, eh? (oh, yes, I am a Canadian) This whole document is an effort to promote and foster worship in our lives. But I think it must be said: As a worship leader, your central pillar, the thing that supports and feeds everything you do must be worship. Life as worship. Private and intimate worship. Corporate worship. And learning and growing in your worship. I remember reading an article, years ago, by a well know Vineyard worship leader and songwriter. He talked about all the events, meetings and services he was leading at, and how rich and productive his life was with worship! But he came to a point when the Lord wanted to deal with something important in his life. He was always leading worship, but he was never simply just worshipping. Spending all of his time leading worship for others, he wasn't taking any time out to worship the Lord privately, or even corporately as a participant who wasn't involved in leading or facilitating a service. I'm not saying that we aren't worshipping when we are leading. In fact, in agreement with Matt Redman's concept of "Lead Worshipers" instead of "Worship Leaders", I know that the only way to lead worship is first to be worshipping in Spirit and Truth. People follow your lead by your example and modelling. Simply getting people singing, or being their cheerleader is not enough.

A great friend told me that when I lead worship, it's like I bound up to the door of the throne room, throw the doors open, burst in and say "Father, I'm here!!". Then, I turn around and say, "Come on everyone! See how easy it is?!? Get in here!" I was both humbled and encouraged by this observation. It also unlocked for me a great picture for worship in general. We are inspired and informed when we see other people doing something. We can stand and watch and criticize or judge (which probably happens too often!), or use the other as an example, and follow their cue. Especially when something is scary or new to us, or when we are unsure of the method or practice involved, it is SO HELPFUL to have someone else "go in" first. Some might say it is cowardice to not go for it by faith. Shouldn't we all be so maverick and bold, and just start worshipping? Well...we're not all created the same, and in all areas of life we can probably admit that we are either leaders or followers, and that's ok! We can't all be plumbers, lawyers, race car drivers, prime ministers, etc. In fact, none of us are required to be masters of ALL things. God in His absolute wisdom and grace sent Moses, David, Paul, John, and HIMSELF to lead in certain seasons and at specific times. I wonder if Paul could've traded places with Moses and done the same kind of job? Or King David with the Apostle John? Even leaders aren't made to cover every role perfectly (except Jesus, He, of course, could fit any bill!).

So ask yourself, are you called to Lead Worship? Yes? Then you don't have to apologize for taking time to worship the Lord, practicing the very thing you are supposed to call-out in others. Simply worship. Be intentional. You owe it to the Lord first, and it also ends up being a gift to your people and yourself. If you are cultivating the practice of Worship, you are that more ready to be in that real place of worship when you get up to lead.

## 2. Intercession - Praying for Your People

As you worship, you will inevitably be led to pray. I know we are not all called **primarily** to be intercessors or prayer warriors, but at the same time, we *are* all called to be prayer warriors and intercessors! Philippians 4:4-7 says:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

It's just a given that we need to be praying, and praying for our people. Jesus often went off to pray, and we know that he fervently prayed for his followers and those he was ministering to. The essential thing to remember here is that YOU as the worship leader need to spearhead praying for your team and your congregation. Pave the way for intimate and Spirit-led worship by interceding for the people you are leading. I can think of 2 great reasons to be a person who prays (but there are many!): 1) God LOVES to know what we want. He is a pro-active Lord and Saviour, and we are created in His image. One of two things will happen if you ask the Lord for things: He will either grant your request or, He will show you why your desire isn't His will. It's a win/win! You either get what you're asking for, or you get to experience more of the Lord's refining in your life. Not always comfortable, but isn't this our goal? To get closer to the Lord and to allow Him to lead us and guide us?

2) And how better to teach our team how to pray but to model it and actively be praying for them? I've thought and said, at times, that leading worship can be like pulling teeth (insert chuckles and laugh emojis here). It always depends on the community, the culture and of course, the spiritual battle at any given time. So if something has the potential to be hard work, then this is all the more reason to be supporting your team and your congregation by praying for them. If we don't ask the Lord to lead the

way, and we don't acknowledge that our fight is not against flesh and blood, how is it that we expect to have active and vibrant worship? We can't conjure it up on our own, so take the opportunity to humble yourself and get praying.

### 3. Prayer Walks

Having trouble staying focused and praying? Are you like me, and find it easy to fall asleep when sitting in one place quietly for too long? Go for a walk! The thing about going for a walk, if you can do it in relative privacy or with others, there's a sense of movement, and there's a sense of direction and focus because your focus is on your destination. We pray for growth and progress as we are getting closer to our physical destination or goal, so the act of walking illustrates the prayers we are uttering. If you can get into the rhythm of walking and turn that into a rhythm of prayer, you can even come up with a mantra, something you can repeat over and over to help still and focus your mind: "Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed" or "Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy on me, a sinner." Some traditions use specific prayers, written prayers or outlines, prayer beads, or a rosary - there are many practices and tools to help, but in the very least, most of us can get up and out of the house and move! Use your physical body as a tool and resource to support your worship.

*Side note: Honestly, physical movement, exercise, and play are so important to your overall health and happiness that they should be a part of their own pillar...I will add it to the list for the next eBook. I just gotta get on it myself...practice what I preach, right?!?*

In the beginning, when God was creating us, he did so with special care and effort. Everything else was created with His word, the power of His voice and command. When it came time to make us, He got down into the thing he had just made and created us out of the dirt. Here we see two key concepts for prayer:

1) There is POWER in what we say. We are created in God's image and we learn from Him that what we bring forth from our guts and breath and muscle has power. Our words have the power to create, to build up and to tear down. If this is true, then our prayers carry a weight that goes way beyond what we can see in the immediate moment. The Lord used his voice to create this world! There's power in what we say to each other and there's power in what we're singing. We use it to sing over each other, to sing things to God and to sing to each other about who God is. This is powerful. When we pray, it puts forth what we are saying, into reality and into the universe, so to speak. We say things out loud and put them into the realm of reality. **When we pray our ideas or even our fantasies,**



**we are essentially testing them with the Lord so that we might see what sticks in the real world. Our words are waves, they are movement (like, literally! Sound is made up of waves!). We are literally shifting things when we speak, pray, and worship.**

2) The Lord got dirty when He made us. He got His hands dirty as He formed us from dirt, and also from flesh (Adam is formed from the earth, Eve is formed from Adam's rib). Don't be afraid to take time out of your life to stop, get a little dirty and pray for the things you want. Pray for the people you care about, the ones you are charged with leading and serving. Sacrificial love is acted out in this way. It takes time, sweat, energy, sometimes blood and tears, but getting our "hands dirty" in service to our congregation or small group or whoever we are leading worship with, it's totally worth it.

## 4. Quietness and Listening Prayer

You will benefit so much from learning to be quiet and still, listening for that still small voice of the Lord. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah got to watch the Lord put on a great display of His power when he challenged the prophets of Baal to prove their god's reality and power. Baal didn't show up, but our one and only True God did! Almost immediately after Elijah "wins" the challenge, proving God's power and existence, he hears that Jezebel (the evil Queen) is after him. In fear for his life, Elijah takes off and decides to hide out and ask the Lord to end his life. But then, God speaks to him. Elijah witnesses a storm of immense power, then an earthquake! When everything dies down, and all that's left is silence, Elijah hears God speaking to him in a still small voice.

As worship leaders, we get to express our worship passionately, and the love and works of God, through loud, exciting music, amplified voices, often on a stage where our movement and action are big and on display. But Elijah's story and Jesus' teaching of private "prayer closet" intimacy with the Father shows us that we must foster a discipline of quietness and receptive posture. This opens our ears and mind to things we might not otherwise hear or notice, it allows for a reboot of sorts, and it brings us to a place of humility where we acknowledge that we don't put our trust in our amplifiers and pedals, sound systems or catchy songs. We put our faith in the only One who matters. Furthermore, we put our trust in Him whether He is displaying His power and strength, OR when He is holding it all back and choosing to be meek and mild, still and quiet. We don't rush, like Saul (1 Samuel 13), to make a show of prayer and worship so we can tick our box and move on to the next thing, expecting God to bless us cause we "worshiped". It's not formulaic, and it's not transactional in the sense that we just do worship and God has to show up. God shows up when He wants, how He wants, and where He wants.

Take time to be still and cultivate a listener's ear to acknowledge that the conversation is the Lord's. Reverence, humility, submission, and openness to instruction is an integral part of our relationship with

the Lord. From this posture, we can start to develop our ability to hear from Him. The topic of Listening to God is a big one, with many practices and philosophies that I would encourage you to seek out and try for yourself. Starting point? I love Brad Jersak's book, *Can You Hear Me?*, Gordon T. Smith's book, *Listening to God in Times of Choice*. I employ a practice of discernment and affirmation loosely based on the method promoted by John Wesley. Wesley believed that we could discern God's will and voice in our life by testing it against Scripture, Tradition (Church History and practice), Reason and Experience. I consider "Church" as being my local community as well as Church History and practice. "Reason" is a combination of natural discernment and logic that involves weighing and considering all the various aspects of a challenge or idea. "Experience", although connected to my own gut or radar, is what I would describe as what the Holy Spirit is saying to me in this time and on this topic/issue.

To sum it up? Foster and practice stillness and open yourself to the voice of God.

## 5. Singing the Psalms

I want to briefly mention one more idea to help bolster your prayer and worship. I remember reading an article by Graham Kendrick (The UK March for Jesus co-founder and songwriter of *Shine Jesus Shine*, among many other great songs) where he explained one of his much-used prayer methods, Singing the Psalms. It's a lot like spontaneous singing, but you have a text to follow. The Psalms are such a rich resource for prayer and expression to the Lord, so why not get into a musical groove and then sing them out, letting them lead you through these ancient rhythms of intimacy? Decide on a chord progression or start with a song that you already know. Find a section of the song that you can repeat and comfortably sing over, then just start singing the words on the page. Don't worry about rhyming or the rhythm being consistent or repeated. Each line can be entirely different, or similar if it works. Eventually, you might get comfortable enough to start doing this in a small group meeting or a bigger worship service. You can even invite others to just sing out their own melodies and rhythms of the text, thereby helping them gain a new way to worship and pray. The Psalms are prayers - poetic, heartfelt and sincere prayers - by worship leaders; I'm sure some of them developed out of spontaneous singing, sung to different melodies. There are 150 of them! That's a lotta good inspiration for worship and prayin', right there.

## II. Honing Your Craft - Study and Practice

The very fact that you're reading this means you are most likely the kind of person that pursues knowledge, growth and excellence as you serve. Following are some tips on honing your craft. And how can we leave out our great textbook! I hate to call it that, since the word "textbook" conjures up

memories of homework and boring reading we had to do at one point or another in our education. But really, the Bible is our source for prayer, history, the person of God, human nature, Church history, artistic expression, wisdom, and SO MUCH MORE! It's a source that we can reference for all aspects of our life. Not always instructional or easy to understand, it can't be figured out or mastered perfectly, so it becomes this bottomless well of information and fuel for working out our salvation. Along with some thoughts on practice and study, there are some basic ideas to engage with the Holy Scriptures.

## 1. Practice makes perfect

There is a legend of sorts that involves Pat Metheny and his daughter's birthday. Metheny, a world-renowned jazz guitar virtuoso, was being interviewed and the interviewer asked him if he still practices. His answer blew most readers and listeners away. The answer was, of course he practices. He said that even for his daughter's birthday, he took aside time to practice Happy Birthday before performing it at the party! Happy Birthday?? This is possibly the most accomplished and respected guitar player of the professional music world, and he has to practice Happy Birthday? I suppose the insight here is not that he *has* to practice Happy Birthday. It is that he is such a devoted musician and a honer of his craft, that he *chooses* to practice. As well, he loves who he is serving, (in this case, his daughter; in our case, our congregation or fellow believers) so he takes preparation for his service seriously.

If we don't choose to practice, we don't respect our craft and calling.

Now, what that practice looks like can take on many forms and options, but the bottom line is that discipleship, or growing through practice, is absolutely necessary for worship leaders.

Where else do we see the concept of practice? Doctor's practice Medicine. Lawyers practice Law. In fact, any kind of art form, sport, mental or physical exercise, philosophy, you name it, is practiced. I love this way of seeing our life because it helps us to realize that Life=Worship=Discipleship=Practice=Life... it's part of the whole system of living, one of the circles of life! To be clear, practice is not just reciting something or mimicking an action that we have already learned or developed. True practice is intentional and pro-active. It is thoughtful and it changes us because whatever we learn is going to influence how we do it next time.

Anybody can get up and recite the notes and words of a song, and do it in front of a group of people that can sing along. **But if we turn it into the discipline and practice of intentional worship as we recite and help others to follow, there's another element in play.** Have you ever walked into a vehicle showroom or a store of some sort and been approached by a salesperson that is clearly running a script or just going through the motions of what they do every time a person walks in the door? And

what is the difference between that and someone who takes a real interest in you? Instead of “phoning it in”, they are present with you in the moment, and their ears and eyes are open to hearing and seeing who you are. After they get to know you, they can assess and communicate with you whether they have some help to offer.

So it is with practicing worship. The Holy Spirit is a REAL PERSON! He is present and involved in our every move and moment. If we can “practice the presence” in the privacy of our own home and time, **we can bring that learned experience into our public offerings as well.**

What about practicing your instrument? When I get up to lead on a Sunday morning, there are a number of things at work:

### 1. **Personal Challenges**

I suffer from clinical anxiety and I get panic attacks when I have to do public things like speaking, music or even small group meetings. I get so I can't breathe and feel sick to my stomach, and this creeps in over 30-60 minutes until it becomes an all-out gagging fest! Gross, I know, but it's true.

### 2. **Technical mayhem**

Whether it's my home church or a church I am visiting, there is always the potential for technical problems. An amp blows, a string breaks, the projector dies, or maybe one of the technicians isn't on their game that day. This adds stress and tension.

### 3. **The Congregation and Recent Events**

Spiritually, Emotionally and Physically, the congregation is going to be in a certain headspace or mood, and this changes from week to week.

Now, considering all of this, is it any wonder that the Worship Leaders of Israel were culled from the most gifted and able musicians and singers? You have the things mentioned above to deal with, PLUS the main gig, which is to help your people enter into worship and spend some time with the Lord together, **YOU CAN'T AFFORD NOT TO PRACTICE!!** With all of the internal and external pressures on you, you have at least a couple things in your power to aid in the process that you and only you can do, especially as you prepare for your service. You get to hone your ability to play and sing and worship, no matter what is going on around you.

One of our professors in College would say that he had practiced the ability to worship and pray to the point that he could get into the zone anywhere at any time. He used to have wonderful times of conversation and prayer with the Lord while he was sitting in a hot and crowded airport and waiting for a delayed plane. If you can practice worship and prayer and music and whatever else you need to, to a point where it doesn't matter whether you have a cheap guitar, a busted monitor system and a rhythmically challenged drummer, YOU WILL WORSHIP because you are so attuned to it.

I used to wish that I could sing prophetically and I figured it was something that only the Holy Spirit could spring on us. Like a surprise! But then I heard some teaching on practicing prophesy, and I started singing spontaneously and jamming extensively while I prepared for a service earlier in the week. After blasting away behind closed (and hopefully sound-proofed!) doors for a season, I all of a sudden noticed I was able to flow into spontaneous singing and prayer in the middle of a formal service. Of course the Lord can put His Spirit on anyone and inspire them to sing or pray or prophesy, and he definitely does this on a regular basis. But, if you want to drink milk, buy a cow. If you want to be a rock star, pick up a guitar. If you want more spontaneous prophetic moments in your worship community, someone needs to reach out and just try it.

For you, this means practicing on a consistent basis whatever it is you're planning to do in service for others. Look at it like this: ask the Lord to do it, but give Him the space, time, and opportunity to anoint and inspire you. He can break in whenever and wherever, but continue to let Him know you are willing and somewhat ready!

Whether it's your instrument, your songs for worship, or praying freely, there's always room to practice. Even the most accomplished musicians keep things at the ready by at least warming up every day. I read an interview with Ben Heppner, the famous heldentenor, one of the best singers in the world who could sing powerful opera by the likes of Wagner. Near the end of his singing career at this point, the interviewer asked him, what does his practice routine look like on a daily basis? He basically said, that since he knows a lot of the music that he sings (he's done it all many times over), his main concern on a daily basis is to keep the voice open and warm at all times. He does about 15 minutes of vocalizing, early in the day, to make sure his vocal folds and rib-coastal-diaphragm muscles are kept in shape. It was like he was an athlete who didn't need to get bigger but had to be ready to play every day. When he went to perform or rehearse with the company, you better believe he got a great workout, but he was prepared to go when duty called. Recently I was on a three-week tour. By about the 5th show, we all felt pretty good about the music, so the pressure to rehearse at every soundcheck was off. Did we stop rehearsing though? It's interesting what happens at that point. You let your guard down and forget to focus, and then you play wrong notes or you miss things. We kept rehearsing at every soundcheck, if only to stay warm and ready, and some days it was a much-needed focus and reminder.

*By purchasing the whole eBook, you will also receive the following sections:*

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