

leading worship in the vineyard

building on our foundational values

written by dan wilt

Leading Worship In The Vineyard *by Dan Wilt*

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Introduction

Welcome to *Leading Worship In The Vineyard*.

You've chosen an exciting and dangerous task. This little booklet is your survival manual. Do you accept your mission?

What's so exciting about worship leading? Using the medium of the music we love, we have the privilege of leading people into the greatest adventure a human being can undertake – the journey to the heart of God.

What's so dangerous about worship leading? In a culture that idolises musicians and elevates emotions, we stand in front of people, behind a microphone, up on a stage, influencing people. Our own hearts sing louder than our musical instruments, and our true character touches people in ways we never before thought possible.

Excitement and danger – that is the privilege of worship leading.

So, now that I have your attention, never fear! The Holy Spirit is on our side, continually shaping and forming our hearts into the likeness of Christ as we rise to the high calling of worship leadership.

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

Serving, loving and leading in a local church is where the “rubber meets the road.” It's where we learn to be givers in this life instead of takers. As 1 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV) says, “*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*” We are given gifts and callings not for the service of our own visibility or personal sense of fulfillment – we are given the gifts we have *to serve the others around us, while being energised by that service.*

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

Please fasten your seatbelt.

CHAPTER 1
WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO
(Our Philosophy Of Leading Worship)

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

*It’s always just slightly beyond us, and so there is always
that feeling in the pit of my stomach saying, ‘What did I do? How did I get talked into
this?’ And then I remember,
‘Oh yeah, God, you called me to do this.
Okay, I’ll do it again.’”¹*

Brian Doerksen

You have been asked to make a sandwich. All of the meat, cheese, vegetables, bread and sauces are laid out in front of you. With no further direction, you begin to bring together all of the culinary elements to make your sandwich the most delicious it can be. Then, just as you are putting the finishing touches on your edible masterpiece, someone stops you. “By the way, the sandwich isn’t for you,” the person says. “It’s for the guy sitting over in the corner.” Someone told you *what* to do, but they never told you *why* to do it.

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

Answering the questions of why we lead worship, and *who* we lead worship for will tell us much about *how* we are to lead worship. Let’s start with a simple context, and philosophy, of worship leading in a Vineyard community. Let’s examine *why* we’re leading worship, and *who* we are leading for, in our Vineyard church.

A. Who Is The Vineyard In The Church Of Today?

“Within a few years of coming to the Vineyard, I began leading worship in a Friday night believers’ meeting. It wasn’t quite a full band, but we had a keyboard and a couple of guitars, and sometimes a bass. In those days, we were afraid of using drums because the Vineyard worship community was born with a desire to avoid any kind of performance mentality. We wanted people to focus on God, not the band. It wasn’t until 1983 that we started using a drummer consistently, and I remember asking him to just play quietly. Looking back, it’s pretty comical.”²

Andy Park

The Vineyard movement is one of the fastest growing, global church-planting movements of this past century. For we who call the Vineyard family our own, we recognise that we are just one part of the beautiful, majestic and powerful organism that is the Church.

Though we are a part of the whole Church, God has designed us in such a way that we find our connection, community and calling expressed in immediate families. The Vineyard is just one international, national and local church expression of an immediate family — a group of people called together for a purpose in their generation. We are drawn together by central values, such as intimacy with God, the equipping of all the saints for ministry, and the essential message of the in-breaking Kingdom of God. We seek to combine the best of the Church’s evangelical and biblical experience with the best of the Church’s experience with the Spirit of God.

1. A Brief History Of The Vineyard

The Vineyard movement was essentially born in desperation. A small gathering of worn-out leaders were moved to deep repentance before God, and began to spend time worshiping and praying together in a living room in Yorba Linda, California. John and Carol Wimber were a part of this group.

Songs of intimate worship became a primary lifeline for these people in the brokenness of those early days, and after leaving the Quakers, and then Calvary Chapel, this growing group linked with an existing network of churches called Vineyards. Over time, these Vineyards, who were equally committed to the Holy Spirit having His way with them, eventually recognized John’s leadership – and the Vineyard movement was born.

John Wimber is today known as the foundational leader of the Vineyard movement. His influence on the renewal movements of the late 20th century cannot be overstated – he was a man with a heart for God, for the whole of the Church, and for the Holy

Spirit's activity in our world. He was also a professional musician, producer and artist – who had a profound encounter with God that led him to bring leadership to the Vineyard movement.

Over the first ten years of John's life as a Christian he led hundreds of people to Christ. *Christianity Today* magazine called him a “beer-guzzling, drug-abusing pop musician, who was converted at the age of 29 while chain-smoking his way through a Quaker-led Bible study” (*Christianity Today*, Editorial, Feb. 9, 1998).³ John was involved with the famed group *The Righteous Brothers*, and was a respected producer as well as being a studio-caliber musician on a wide variety of instruments. After laying down his highly successful music career to follow God's call on his life as a spiritual leader in the Church, John began to radically give himself to reaching people for Christ. As his influence grew, John began to teach courses at Fuller Theological Seminary, and he and Carol eventually planted a Calvary Chapel church in California.

Through the influence of George Ladd's writing, John embraced the “Kingdom of God” as Jesus taught it – the in-breaking presence of God's active rule and reign. His encounters with the Holy Spirit, the activity of the Spirit in healing, deliverance, miracles and evangelism, led John to join, and eventually lead, the Vineyard churches.

John and his own congregation experienced God in profound ways through times of intimate and honest worship, in contemporary sounds and language. Vineyard gatherings were packed with young people, many out of the Jesus People movement of the 1960s, and “come as you are” dress codes and the soft-rock musical styles of the day marked their gatherings. The songs were written “to God,” as opposed to just “about God,” and a fresh wind of intimate worship began to stir the hearts of many. There was no hype, no charismatic worship leader trying to stir up the emotions of the crowd in those early days – just simple, honest worshiping, led by a band and a gentle worship leader with a heart for God. John had a vision of hundreds of “garage bands” (a term for informal bands that rehearse in someone's garage, typically playing drums, guitars, bass, etc.) called to lead people into living worship.

Over time, the music pouring out of the Vineyard's heart before God began to be overwhelmingly embraced by the Church across North America and Europe. These fresh expressions of worship, led by these “garage bands” with unassuming worship leaders and simple songs, were the perfect vehicle for the Church to once again embrace the nearness of God and His work in the world. A significant renewal, across the streams of the Church, was occurring due to John's (and others') obedience – a renewal of the gifts of the Spirit, church growth by conversions, and a brutal honesty with God in intimate, contemporary worship music. Without hype and with unassuming leaders, the Vineyard influence has been felt throughout the 20th and 21st century Church world.

Today, there are almost 1000 Vineyard churches in nations around the world, all who are in some way marked by a common genetic code – a heart to proclaim the in-

breaking Kingdom of God, to heal the sick, to bring deliverance to the oppressed, to care for the poor, to train all Christians to live out the ministry of Jesus, and to meet with God in intimate, honest and passionate worship.⁴ Studies have marked the Vineyard as one of the first truly postmodern church movements of our century. Other movements, such as New Wine and Soul Survivor, attribute their beginnings to the influences of John Wimber and the Vineyard.

2. Our Worship Roots In The Vineyard

In this fertile soil, worship leaders and songwriters were both attracted to, and prolifically added to, the worship community of the Vineyard. Songs such as *Isn't He, Faithful One*, *Change My Heart O God*, *Refiner's Fire*, *Only You*, *I Lift My Eyes Up* and many others began to powerfully impact the common worship life of the contemporary church.

People beyond the Vineyard were singing directly to God, and not just about Him. "Up until the 1960s, liturgy and traditional hymn singing dominated the worship landscape of churches across the Western world. When the 1960s came around, a fresh poetic voice was being heard from the American counter-culture. Guitars, long hair and heartfelt lyrics began to burst onto the social scene. As a generation of the aimless and searching began to encounter living truth in Christ, fresh songs of indigenous worship began to reflect such brutal honesty and hope. Churches began to centre their entire worship service around extended times of singing and responding to God through song."⁵

In review, our movement was born in a living room, where a few people had gathered out of a deep hunger to encounter God intimately. Over the course of just a few decades, the Vineyard Movement has grown to be international, with nerve centres of Kingdom activity scattered across the globe. Vineyard music and its worship experience have forever altered the landscape of the historical Church, and much of today's proliferation of worship music owes its roots to the Vineyard movement, and others like it, of the 20th century.

Though the form and style of church life varies in many respects across Vineyard churches, one thing remains true in virtually every case: the guiding values that we hold dear as the Vineyard are represented, in some way, shape or form, in all of those churches.

Whether our value of caring for the poor is expressed in soup kitchens or clothing stores, or whether our value of intimate worship is expressed to the sound of an alternative band or a single piano, our values weave through the tapestry of the family we call The Vineyard.

How do these roots affect our values related to biblical worship, and the musical expression of worship?

B. What Are The Worship Values That Drive Us?

“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out.”⁶

Romans 12:1-2, *The Message*

Let’s talk a bit about worship. Worship is a living act that encompasses all of our lives offered to Jesus in complete and utter surrender. Whether we are singing songs on a Sunday morning, handing clothes to someone who needs them on Wednesday, or choosing how we’ll spend our work paycheck on Friday, every act of life has the potential to be an offering of worship.

The early Church father, Irenaeus of Lyons, put it this way, “The glory of God is a human being, fully alive.” When Romans 12:1-2 defines worship, it describes worship as a “living sacrifice” on the part of the worshiper. In other words, we put God at the beginning, middle and end of our every thought, choice and action.

When we turn all of life into a simple *response* to the love of God (1John 4:19), we are truly becoming the worshipers for whom the Father is searching (John 4:24).

1. What Does Music Have To Do With It?

If worship is a whole life response to the love of God, then what does music have to do with worship?

Brian Doerksen, respected contemporary worship leader and songwriter, explains it this way:

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

Yet we can get ten people, or a hundred people, or a thousand, or a hundred thousand - whatever number we choose - and we can all get together and sing a song. That song reflects what is going on in our hearts and our minds, together. There is truth that we’re affirming, but there’s also affection that we’re expressing. That’s why I think that singing as an expression of worship has stood the test of time.”⁷

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

can meet with God.

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

People come to a time of worship saying in the quiet of their hearts what the psalmist said, “Where and when can I go and meet with God?” The worship leader responds, “How about here? How about now?” and leads them to that place of meeting.

2. The Role Of The Worship Leader

Suddenly learning parts from a CD, preparing set lists, rehearsing mid-week for a few hours, getting up early on a Sunday morning to set up gear and to sound check, choosing to love in relationships and playing for two or three services a week takes on a *context*.

We are serving the people of God, with the gifts and passions that energise us, by creating a “place” for us all to encounter God.

In some beautiful way, this reality makes all the hard work seem to be a grand privilege – that we would get to enjoy our love for music in such a way that leads others to a more beautiful place with God than they had been before.

Worship leading, as Brian Doerksen put it, is most like the role of the best man or maid of honour at a wedding. We are leading the Bride and Groom to intimately share in acts of love and commitment between one another. How horrible it would be to think of the best man in a wedding drawing away the attention of the Bride to himself, or of the maid of honour drawing the Groom’s attention to herself!⁸

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

3. Our Uniqueness As Vineyard Worship Leaders

Let’s review once more. As a Vineyard community, our international, immediate family of churches was born in a living room, where a few people were so desperate to interact intimately with God that they would often linger for hours, singing songs of love to Jesus.

To their amazement, God was even more interested than they were in imminently

interacting with His people. At a time when God was primarily worshiped in what some of that generation felt had become staunch and dry, formalised liturgies in churches across North America, He began to breathe on a generation to get back to honest and heartfelt communication directly and experientially with Him – using the gift of contemporary worship music to bring that relationship to life.

The gift to us as Vineyard worship leaders today is that we stand as part of an incredibly powerful modern worship movement that has opened the doorway in our day to countless millions encountering God through contemporary worship expression.

In other words, we stand on a heritage of community, faithfulness, integrity and rich experience as we come to lead worship in our community. On the other hand, an entire multi-million dollar industry has now formed around the precious jewel of worship, and brought a whole new set of character challenges, musical challenges and leadership challenges to today's contemporary Church worship leader.

In the midst of these challenges, our values are what keep us centred, focused and faithful. We, as an international Vineyard movement, share common worship values, and remain committed to creating spaces for people to worship God that are 1) Intimate, 2) Accessible, 3) full of Integrity, 4) Culturally Relevant and 5) guided by Kingdom Expectation.

4. Our Worship Values

Hopefully we all love Jesus, and are moving in the same direction across the worldwide Church. But, just as a lime slice changes the taste of water, each expression or movement of the Church has a unique *twist* – defined by its history, preferences, demographic and leadership. In a day when the common person's musical palate is very refined by being inundated with music at every turn, there are a few core values that guide us along, as Vineyard worship leaders, as we seek to lead 21st century people into a place of worship encounter through contemporary worship music.

a. We Value Intimacy In Worship.

Intimacy, in any relationship, does not just happen when the lights are low and the music soft. Intimacy can be loud and celebrative, or soft and sweet. Intimacy is a posture, a positioning, of one heart toward another.

Intimacy happens when one heart chooses to make itself vulnerable to another, choosing self-offering above self-preservation; self-disclosure above self-protection.

God has chosen to make Himself intimately, honestly and vulnerably known to us. He has self-revealed His love and the depths of His person to us. When we turn to Him, and respond to His love with honesty, vulnerability and self-disclosure, then we are

engaging in the intimate relationship into which He Himself is inviting us.

You'll notice, in many of the songs that we sing in the Vineyard, that the lyrics of the songs are speaking directly to God and inviting an exchange with Him. Sometimes they are a prayer, sometimes they are a lament, and other times they are the simplest of love songs. These types of songs take their place in the whole body of songs the Church has sung throughout the ages, and refresh a beautiful element this generation has been longing for – intimate communication with God through simple songs of love.

b. We Value Accessibility In Worship.

When a wheelchair ramp appears at the entrance of a corporate building, we immediately know what that business is trying to do. It is making itself *accessible* to those who may otherwise have trouble entering. Others may already be inside who have found entry easy; accessibility tries to make entry easy for *everyone*.

Our songs are often simple, and very melodic, as we are trying to make a way for everyone gathered in a room to find their way to God through the songs we sing.

Our musical goal is not to impress people with the capabilities of the band, or worse yet, with the capabilities of an individual, but rather to beautifully create a musical space for people to meet with God.

We have one goal ever before us as a team. We are playing so that the congregation might find a clear way to lay down the burdens they walked in with at the feet of Jesus, and to meet with Him in worship through the vehicle of the music that we make. We are poised as a worship team to serve, to use all our musical giftings to get *out* of the way, and to *make* a way, for people to get to that place of encounter.

c. We Value Integrity In Worship.

People may not be able to put their finger on it, but they somehow intuitively know if a worship leader, or any leader for that matter, is leading out of the integrity of their secret life with God.

In other words, when people sense that the “worship show” is all about the leader and the musicians, and is less about the congregation meeting with God, they sense a hollowness in the corporate worship experience over time.

We can't sing songs about pursuing God with any integrity if we are not actively pursuing Him in our own lives. We cannot sing songs that move us to care for the poor, if we in our own lives are not actively questing to care for the poor.

For worship leaders and teams to effectively build a congregation as a worshipping

community over time, that team must value their personal lives with God over and above the opportunity to express their personal musical gift on a stage.

When we lead with integrity, we are *giving* to the community, and taking our place as a servant. When we lead without integrity, we are *taking* from the community, and taking our place as a parasite — for the elevation of our gifts and ourselves.

In other words, we don't want to just *look* good or *sound* good – we want to actually *be* good.

d. We Value Cultural Relevance In Worship.

We live in a time, and in a place in history. As Vineyard communities, we embrace the sounds and musical textures of today's music, choosing to be true to who God has made us to be, and true to the communities we are seeking to reach.

For that reason our music is not dated in its sound, but is current with the kinds of sounds today's listeners, and worshipers, love to hear.

In considering the value of cultural relevance as it relates to worship leading, we must hold some truths in tension. As a worship community we don't want to contrive our sound, making music we're not comfortable with, always trying to "keep up" with popular culture. At the same time, we hold this in tension with the reality that we want to avoid "churchy" or "Christian sub-culture" musical styles that seem disconnected from the daily music experience of the average person on the street.

What is the answer? We seek in our worship expressions to reflect the demographic of our local community (both inside the church and outside), and this means that we choose the music of today's culture with which to worship, integrated with the familiar music of the Church historic (i.e. hymns, etc.). The sound that results from this quest is usually very culturally current music, that sounds like the tunes one might hear on the radio on any given day – but with lyrics that focus us Godward.

As we do this, we are laid back, and low-hyped, in our approach to worship. We wear to church what we wear everyday, and we seek to break down the barriers that people perceive between church life and everyday life. We seek to make our church language as accessible as our street language, much in the way that the writer's of the New Testament did.⁹ For that reason, our church services and worship sets are typically led in gentle, pastoral ways, and not in showy, glitzy or personality-centred ways. We're not trying to stir anyone up; we're simply creating an accessible place of worship for people by leading it with the sound of music and style of lyrics that they love and with which they are familiar.

e. *We Value Kingdom Expectation In Worship.*

Possibly the most significant, unique quality of the Vineyard movement today is its emphasis on the central theological foundation of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels – the Kingdom of God.

Rooted in the Jewish hope for a redemption to come, Jesus came to the world declaring to human beings that God's Kingdom is "within our reach." In other words, God's Kingdom is now (among us), and not yet (still to come). He gives us tastes, like appetisers, of our future inheritance by the Holy Spirit – healing us, renewing our minds, encountering us in powerful ways – even as we worship Him. This idea we call "the presence of the future."

Vineyard worship expression was born in a living room, where a few people were gathered to engage in the simple act of adoring worship. As they sang songs to God, and not just about Him, they made room for His Spirit to move among them. God's Kingdom began to break in among them in powerful and miraculous ways.

When we gather to worship, we expect every time that each individual, as well as our corporate community, will have an intimate exchange with God. We expect His Kingdom to break in at any and every moment, as He heals, delivers and transforms us as broken people.

So too, in our Vineyard worship expression, we never want to lose the dynamic of creating worship settings that have plenty of "space," both musically and spiritually, for God to interact with His people. For us, worship is not about a shining worship leader and a killer band – its about serving God and people by making a way for us all to meet with Him.

C. The Character Of A Worship Leader

"The one thing I would say to anybody who would be getting into worship leading, or to anybody who is a worship leader right now, is that the job of leading worship - – your job of leading worship and my job of leading worship – one day will probably end. It is possible, but it is unlikely, that at 90 years of age I am going to be in an old-age home strumming on my guitar leading people in worship. Who I am before God however, does not end. That truth has eternal quality to it, and one day I am going to be standing before Him, and I won't be standing behind a microphone with a guitar on my back.

It is just going to be me and Him."¹⁰

Brenton Brown

In the Vineyard, we are looking primarily for leaders who are strong in character, and

not simply full of gifting (or full of themselves!). In other words, *who a person is* in the secret place of their hearts is infinitely more important to us than *how they play* their instrument, sing or function in front of a crowd. Having said that, it is also true that we value the power of beautiful and well-played worship music – but only if it flows from hearts of people who are content to give Jesus, and others, the place of prominence.

Many times I have had both the privilege, and the challenge, of sharing with worship leaders on the topics of integrity and godly character as primary hallmarks of an effective worship leader. I often prompt the discussion by asking a leading question, such as “What is the strongest, and most powerful instrument you lead with as a worship leader?” The responses are as varied as the musical preferences in the room. “My voice.” “My guitar.” “My keyboard.” Someone inevitably speaks up, in a commonly shy manner, and gives the answer behind the answers: “My life.” All heads in the room nod in agreement as we strike a profound spiritual chord together.¹¹

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

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

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

Let’s look at the same values we mentioned above, in light of our character, and ask some important questions:

1. Do I Value Intimacy?

In other words, am I the kind of person who loves to worship God in secret as much as I love to play in front of a crowd? Is my life with God growing, vibrant, full of expectation and marked by a sense of His nearness? Am I willing to go deeper with God, before I ever lead anyone else to a deeper place? Do I hunger for more of God? Do I deeply desire to follow the way of Jesus? Am I willing to lead “transparently,” so the congregation falls more deeply in love with Jesus than with me?

2. Do I Value Integrity?

When I am in front of people, is it more about what I get from them, or what they get from me? Is my life lived in such a way that cares for the poor, prays for the broken one, and is content to be passionate for God when no one is watching? Do I believe the songs that I sing? Are the words of the worship songs I lead meaningful for me personally? Do they say what I want to say to God? Am I the same person when no one is watching, as I am when others are watching? Is there anything in me that “needs” to lead worship, for my own sense of self-fulfillment and value?

3. Do I Value Accessibility?

Am I content to play simple songs of love, and choose worship sets based on those who are a part of the community I lead? Am I willing to die to myself to serve my worship team, my pastor and others, all towards us *all* encountering Christ in worship? Am I committed to learn new songs that will access the prayers of people’s hearts in our community, at the same time that I am willing to play an old song (for the 947th time) in order to do the same? Am I as willing to lead 3 people in worship in a living room, or 15 children in a Sunday School class, as I am to lead a congregation? Can I get out of the way, to make a way for others?

4. Do I Value Cultural Relevance?

Do I come out of a church tradition that creates unnecessary barriers between church culture and the culture around me? Does my style of playing, leading or singing represent the musical tastes and demographic of the community I am being asked to lead in? Do I live a life that is seeking to live out the ways of Jesus in the streets, in the marketplace and in inter-church relationships? Is my motive in wanting to lead less concerned with what the congregation needs, and more concerned with my desire to play my instrument? Am I willing to get involved in my community outside of church, to get to know the felt needs of the community of which our church is a part? Do I own my pastor’s vision for touching our community?

5. Do I Value Kingdom Expectation?

Am I more of a song leader, or a worship leader? Could the term “lead worshiper” be applied to me? Am I able to defer to the leader of the meeting when they sense we need to either stop worship, or keep going? Am I willing to create a musical space that leads people into an interaction with God, even if it means playing a G chord for 30 minutes? Am I able to lead worship with “one ear to earth, one ear to heaven,” and to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit without derailing a well-led worship set? Do I want God to break in and transform people as we gather to worship, and are my prayers to that end?

As John Wimber put it, we value character above gifting, and want our worship leaders:

- *to be passionate pursuers of God,*
- *to love the Scriptures and to know them well,*
- *to seek unity in the whole Church,*
- *to live with compassion and mercy toward all people,*
- *to mentor and equip others beyond themselves,*
- *to relationally care for the people around them,*
- *to live generous lives that are outward in focus,*
- *to value simple and authentic ways of living, praying and worshiping, and*
- *to be risk-takers who are willing to go where God seems to be going.*¹²

CHAPTER 2

HOW WE DO WHAT WE DO

(The Practice Of Leading Worship)

“So don’t be afraid to learn by doing, even though the earliest steps are sometimes slow and awkward. You’ll never get anywhere unless you start at square one.”¹³

Andy Park

Let’s assume a few things. You probably either play the guitar, or the keyboard. Most Vineyard worship leaders lead from one of these two instruments. Why? Because they are common to contemporary music, they are harmonic (accompaniment) instruments, and they can be used to musically and rhythmically lead a band. If you play another instrument, good on you! If you play no instrument, you probably lead alongside a keyboardist or a guitar player. If you play the tuba, there will be more for you in our next book, *Leading Worship From Instruments That Are Painful To Play*.

This first section, *Leading Worship*, will be addressed to all worship leaders, whether you are leading worship in a living room, or in front of thousands. The second section, *Leading A Worship Band*, will be addressed to those leading along with other musicians. Our last section of this chapter will address relating to your pastoral leaders, mentoring other worship leaders, and making progress as a growing worship leader.

A. Leading Worship

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

So, in fear and trepidation, I decided I would give it a go, and the Lord showed up. It was great.”¹⁴

Kathryn Scott

Worship leadership is both an art and a science. It is not an exact science, nor is it rocket science. Worship leadership is the profound combination of effective musical skill, organization and preparation, experience, practice, calling, character, intuition, gifting and God’s grace. Given the nature of the mandate of the worship leader, to effectively facilitate the worship interaction of God’s people with Himself, both the art and science of worship leadership do need some attention. I am constantly amazed

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

For starters, worship is all about God. Following from that, worship leadership is all about the people who have gathered to worship God. God doesn't need us to lead Him in worship; He calls us to create a way for other human beings to centre their thoughts and affections on Him as a response to His love. When we create that space for others, God then responds back in manifestations, personal and corporate, of His love.

So, as a worship leader, you are effectively a lead worshiper, leading the way in music and songs for others, by worshiping with them yourself. When you flow smoothly from song to song, not jarring or scaring the worshipers with your transitions, then they are able to comfortably go with you to that place of exchange with God.

For the purposes of this quick glance at worship leading dynamics, we'll break up the worship leading experience into three phases: the **Pre-leading phase**, the **Present-leading phase**, and the **Post-leading phase**. We'll look at each one in point form, and hopefully touch some of the tips that many have learned from the school of hard knocks.

1. The Pre Phase

In the pre-leading phase of worship leading, there is a fair amount of homework to be done. As the old maxim states, "prepare to be spontaneous." Many of my own frustrations as a worship leader, as for many other worship leaders I know, lie in this area of leading. A few tips from the school of hard-knocks may help avoid some of the pitfalls you may be experiencing in worship leading:

Recognise that you are there for the congregation you are about to lead; they are not there primarily to be your audience. In other words, you are a servant to this group of people you are leading, and your role is to do whatever it takes, to sacrifice whatever it takes, to lead this group to a place where they can joyfully meet with God. The congregation is not there to be our captive audience, to watch us express our gifts or to show them our stuff. Regard the stage as God's, a place to express His fame, and all will be well. Congregations intuitively know if the worship leader is giving to them, or taking from them. Be a giver.

Use the instrument you lead with often in your personal times of worship. The more time you log in on an instrument, the more you are playing it instead of it playing you! Get more and more comfortable worshiping alone with your guitar or keyboard, or other instrument. If you can, worship and practice the songs in the environment you will regularly lead in (the church sanctuary or hall). Let the sound of the system become familiar. Practice, and worship, with CDs. It all helps.

Choose songs that the group you are leading knows and loves. When planning a worship set, the lion's share of the songs should be tunes the congregation loves and knows. Intersperse those songs with one or two new ones, but even those should be lingered over for a few weeks until the group owns them. You may have to rehearse and play a song 30 times before the congregation is even beginning to know it by heart. Don't move on too quickly for the congregation, even though the song has become tired for you.

Practice a structure of the song that seems to work, i.e. verse/chorus/verse/chorus/chorus. Let the team have something to expect, and then change plans only if necessary in the midst of worship. Don't leave too much to the spontaneity of the moment. Unless your players are all professional musicians, not knowing what to expect can be disheartening and frustrating instead of "spiritual and spontaneous."

Rehearse personally before you rehearse with anyone else. This helps for quicker learning of the songs together, security for other musicians, expedited rehearsal time, impartation of love for the song, and opens the door for helpful input.

Be well prepared for rehearsal in other details. Make sure the team has *accurate* chord charts (and/or music) for each song they don't have. Remember, paper is cheap. Save time by having extras on hand so you don't have to run back and forth to the photocopier. If your team doesn't have worship song binders, get them binders yourself.

Pray and select songs that you love to play. If you are confident and enjoying yourself, chances are that others will follow your lead.

Select songs according to the season of the life of your church. Have an updated master list with keys, style of the song, and the title in front of you so that you can see the whole banquet before picking the portions for the week.

Memorise the songs. Memorise the songs. Memorise the songs. Now, don't run away. Just read on for a moment. The distraction of looking at charts, music, and/or lyrics can be deadening to your worship leading. If you have memorised the song, you are free in worship to look at the congregation, the team, and to hear the gentle whispering of the Spirit. Leading from chord charts can be too mechanical otherwise, and can be distracting to you and the worshipers.

(Try this method. Play the song over and over again with the chart, then try it over and over again without the chart, peeking at it section-by-section as needed. After you have memorised it, play it over and over again without the chart, and try to do that each day until you are going to use it. I have played any one song (especially harder ones) at least 20 times before I've tried to do it live without charts.

Having worked that hard on the song, you probably won't forget it with people in front

of you, and you probably won't forget it for a long time to come! If you don't have a song memorised, don't beat yourself up over it, or worse yet, don't try to play it half-memorised! Distraction hinders congregational worship, and good, smooth flowing music facilitates it. Use chord charts if you must.)

Listen to the quality of your instrument. It makes beautiful sounds; play it gently and with care, lest it rebel. Let the music breathe, and learn from better players how not to “fill all the space” with your playing.

Make small musical steps in your playing week to week. In other words, trying something just a bit new (i.e. make your pinkie do something it didn't have to do before) each week will eventually add much more seasoning to the meat and potatoes of your worship leading.

Make a list long enough to pick and choose from. Have plenty of celebration, medium songs, and intimate songs for a variety to draw on. I often have one or two songs that I feel like the time will hinge on. Head for those songs with the others, and draw on them if you hit a moment of “sweat and standstill.”

Be so prepared before “Sunday morning” that you can focus on the Lord, the team, and the heartbeat of the morning (or gathering) without being harried to tie loose ends. Most worship leaders have found that Sunday mornings and events have enough troubles of their own without adding to those troubles by last-minute panic-preparation. Do as much as you can early on in the week.

Be familiar with “vamps.” Vamps are chord progressions that you can improvise over in worship, and that you will probably use to introduce the song and to linger on if the moment is appropriate. Often, the vamp is the chord progression between the chorus you just sang, and the next verse you are about to sing. Rehearse vamps with your team. Give the band a feel for where you will probably use them. Again, prepare to be spontaneous.

Remember that the capo is your friend. This is for guitarists. In preparation for worship, sometimes variations of the song in high-end guitar can accentuate the sound beautifully. It also allows a second guitar to play the lower-end chords without musical or rhythmic clash. If one guitar is playing high, with a capo, a second guitar can be playing low without a capo for a nice sound.

Make it a habit to initiate communication with the pastor or the leader of the gathering early in the week. They have the ultimate responsibility before God for the equipping of the saints, and to facilitate the ministry that God is wanting to do. Find a consistent way to ask the pastor what the Lord is putting on their heart for the gathering, or for their teaching, and actively look for scriptures, songs, etc., to facilitate what God is giving them. Don't wait for them to track you down for input. Usually they have a million things on their mind that week and are blessed by such a request.

2. The Present Phase

Assume that the people have come to meet with God. “When can I go and meet with God?” the psalmist asked (Psalm 42:2). When you prepare to strike the first chord on your guitar or keyboard, assume that the reason everyone has gathered is because they want to meet with God. If you start there, you will be less inclined to cheerlead the congregation or say lots of things as you simply lead people to a place where they can have their heart’s desire. You are at your best when you are *facilitating* people’s worship – not *making* something happen with psycho-spiritual religious gymnastics.

Consider beginning the time of worship with a brief prayer, a passage of Scripture, or a word of encouragement. I find that this is a quality way to bring a moment of much needed focus on God for those who are gathering, for the team, and for me. The Bible has some very encouraging things to say about God and us; you really ought to read it sometime!

Keep your eyes open most of the time. We often label the closing of our eyes as an intimate show of communion with God. When done for that purpose, it is quite appropriate. However, I think we do it many times because we don’t want to see the train wreck! Or if the train is wrecking as we go along, we shut them to avoid the pain in others’ eyes!

In the Vineyard, we emphasise the importance of keeping our eyes open when we pray to see what God is doing in the people we are ministering to. The faces of the people are not always an accurate measure of the effectiveness of the worship time, but making contact with people through your eyes is very important. Many times I smile as I am singing at dear saints a few rows back, and for that moment we are celebrating together. We model that we are corporately worshiping by our connectedness and demeanor at the front. Closing our eyes all of the time can cut us off from the very people we are seeking to lead.

Sing clearly, confidently, and sing the melody. When you lead, lead. Mumbling creates insecurity in your leadership, and singing confidently gives a strong sense of direction. It is not controlling to lead confidently, but rather is very freeing for the congregation (by “confidently” I do not necessarily mean “loudly” – a boisterous worship leader can be as distracting as a timid one). As well, avoid trailing off on flourishes or harmonies when you are the worship leader. Unless the whole congregation knows the song so well they could each sing it to you backwards (the song, not them), it will distract and confuse the masses if you venture too far from the melody in the context of leading of the song.

Shoot toward making the playing of your instrument second-nature. This refers to what I mentioned before. The more fluid you are in playing your instrument, the more freed up you are to listen to the Lord’s instructions as you go. I can be thinking of 25 different things in the middle of a worship song. “Boy, it’s good to see them here

this week,” “She looks like she is really hating all this racket,” “Lord, touch Tom while we play this song,” “Oh, I forgot to call him this week!” or “I wonder what we should have for lunch?” You know what I mean! We sometimes miss the next chord when we are distracted. The better prepared we are, the less chance of goof-ups that distract.

Avoid “indulgent worship.” What I mean by “indulgent worship” is worship experiences that are meaningful to you, and maybe even to the band, but lose the people. You are there to serve their expression of worship and intimacy with God. Long instrumental times, or long prophetic rabbit-trails are not always God’s highest, especially for a Sunday morning. Conferences and special celebrations I find much different than small groups or Sunday mornings. Be careful not to justify indulgent and loose leading with a spiritual label. Humbly ask your pastor if you are unsure of the appropriateness of some of your choices as you lead. They are called by God to be in touch with the people, and will have some ready insight.

Unless you and your team have been playing together for years, talk about your body language and how they are to know where you are going with the song. My team is well-trained to watch, watch, watch me. They’ve come to know, generally, my body language, what the intensity in my voice means, what the strumming of my guitar is leading to, etc. Verbalise it if necessary. My drummers watch the head of my guitar and my left leg closely! They know that if I am wanting to speed up or slow down, they will see it there first.

Consider starting each song on your guitar or lead instruments, at least for a few bars. This enables me to re-orient my tempo (which is often necessary) before the band comes in and sets it in stone. I remember times in my early days leading worship when I would start off playing in the wrong time signature, and was thankful that the band was waiting for me to find it! A solid tip – after you finish one song in your set, begin to sing the chorus of the next song in your head before you start strumming or playing that next tune. This trick will help you to lock into a sense of the tempo and timing of the song before you start to lead into it.

Have signals with your sound person. He or she should be watching you anyway, but it is good to have agreed-upon signals about sound that don’t require your hands to be involved.

Keep consistent eye contact with the lead pastor. It is crucial to remember that none of us lead in a vacuum. We are called to lead together in distinct roles. The pastor is called to have a sense of the overall pulse of the gathering of the saints in your local congregation, and it is crucial to maintain communication with them (verbal and non-verbal) and walk in submission throughout your part in leading a gathering. This goes for smaller groups as well. Sometimes I will even get down from the stage to have a brief exchange with my pastor, determining where he is sensing we should go in worship. We are not mavericks, just doing our own thing. We walk in submission to those God has given primary oversight, and our gifts and leadership follow suit.

Remember that your sound person is part of the worship team, and is not just there to serve you. Be sensitive to their needs as they work to be sensitive to yours, even in the midst of the worship set.

Don't just barrel through ministry times; they can be the most sensitive and exciting times to learn to hear the gentle leading of the Holy Spirit. Pastor people as you lead in ministry times. Pray for people with the songs. Let God use you in those precious moments of Him speaking into hearts.

3. The Post Phase

Always remember to first ask the Lord, before anyone else, what He felt about the worship time you just led. Success and failure are events, not people. Before you go seeking others' affirmation, or throwing your guitar through the nearest window, quiet your heart before the Lord (you can even do this immediately after your part in the service, in the comfort of your seat) and receive His love and input. I am often surprised by what I sense the Lord's perspective was on a time of leading.

Receive input graciously. Sometimes you will receive encouragement, sometimes you will receive criticism. Respond with grace to each remark, and remember to lay each one before the Lord for His Glory or for discernment. No matter what spirit a comment is brought in, ask the Lord if He wants to speak to you through it. If it is a remark of thanks, honour the person and respond in kind with "thank you." Remember, if "it was all God" and none of you, it would have been much richer of an experience for everyone! He used you, and He receives glory if you give it to Him in your heart.

Learn from your mistakes. Have someone video-tape you leading worship sometime. You will be amazed at things you see that you never imagined so consistently occur! Remember little boo-boos and big bombaroos, and make sure that they don't happen again if you can help it. If not, laugh a lot. It eases the stress.

Take the initiative to ask your pastor/leader how they felt the worship time went, and if they have any input. After they pick themselves up off the floor, they will respond to your teachability with some invaluable thoughts and perspectives. Receive what is said with humility, and take it before the Lord. Even if you think they don't have a clue because they "weren't worshiping like everyone else" was, submit the question anyway. You'll be surprised how far a little check-in like that will go.

Always, always, always, give the glory to God after you have led. Sit down at home, or in the car, and hand it all back to Him. A friend of mine speaks of "glory" as being like radioactivity. It's powerful stuff, but if you hold on to it too long, it will kill you. Keep it all centred on Jesus, especially in a generation that glorifies and idolises musicians. You have a stage and platform, as a worship leader, for one purpose alone – to lead people to connect with God.¹⁵

B. Leading A Worship Band

“The more I lead, the more confident I feel. The more experience I have, the more I become aware of what God is saying. In the past, when things have been going badly, my head would go down and I would think, ‘Let’s just get through this.’ I would feel so terrible. But now, I get more and more desperate for God to do something and I say, ‘Lord, what is it you might be wanting to do?’ I am trying to be more eager to hear His voice.”¹⁶

Tim Hughes

It is always amazing to me how the dynamics related to building an effective worship team are very similar to those related to building a healthy family, a healthy Church, a healthy business or a healthy sports team. Human beings, as you may have guessed, are the common denominator in all of these equations, and it is in the realm of human relationships that we find the keys to managing healthy relationships in a worship team. However, I would challenge the language of team being the most effective term applied to what is happening among the group of musicians that we call a worship team. While the words are harmless enough, let’s differentiate between a *team* and a *tribe* (or *community*). If a *team* is primarily a functional unit, made up of various participants fulfilling divisions of labour to accomplish a task, then I would contrast this with a *tribe* or *community* – a gathering of inter-related members who fulfill responsibilities related to the fulfilling of their shared needs, and the blessing of their shared relationships.

To understand your worship team in the sense of “community” or “tribe” may refine your approach to handling the tender matters of relationship and musicianship that come with the territory. First, we’ll look at pastoring your “tribe,” and then we’ll look at how we can gel musically.

1. Building Your Band Relationally & Spiritually

In Galatians 5:22 (NIV), we find a listing of what have been commonly called “the fruits of the Spirit.”

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

These “fruits” are most accurately the character traits of the Holy Spirit, modeled in the life of Jesus, that are meant to be the common traits of those who are filled with the Spirit of God. In other words, the attributes listed are the surest evidence that God is indeed in our midst, actually present and ruling and reigning in our lives. Personally and corporately, we are to bear the natural fruit that bursts forth from a healthy tree – in this case, the tree of our friendship with God.

In the NIV version of the scriptures, these fruits were listed as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. In *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, these words are expanded, and read like this:

“But what happens when we live God’s way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard – things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.”¹⁷

Given that a worship community is a microcosm of the community that is the Church, with defined tasks and functions in the community, we’ll apply each of the fruits of the Spirit to the maintenance of healthy relational dynamics among the creative tribe that is your worship community.

Love: “affection for others”

Model for your team a style of leadership that always has their highest and best interests in mind. When you express love and affection for your team members, over time, they will begin to show it to one another. When you set up someone’s instrument for him or her, or honour that person in front of the band, it will be contagious.

Joy: “exuberance about life”

Make sure that you make time to just play, without your instruments, together. Plato once said that you learn more about someone in an hour of play than in a lifetime of work. Make sure you find space to eat together, have parties together, and to enjoy one another’s unique personalities.

Peace: “serenity”

Keep short accounts with one another. Pray for your team, and make sure that any relational conflict is not left to fester, but rather dealt with as lovingly, gently and as quickly as possible.

Patience: “We develop a willingness to stick with things”

In rehearsal, when someone needs to work out their own part, give them time to do so. The other team members may have to show them patience, but that’s a good exercise for musicians. Show the team members that you are willing to stick with them as they grow as disciples, and as people.

Kindness: “a sense of compassion in the heart”

Guard your words, and make sure that for every criticism you must give that you have offered at least 10 words of encouragement before that time. Many worship leaders wonder why their band members are so easily offended, when often the worship leader has never learned how to encourage people to the point where individuals can receive input more easily. Oh, and in case you didn’t know it, musicians and creatives tend to be, well... *sensitive* human beings. Use the fruit of kindness frequently, and empathise with the needs of each of your bandmates.

Goodness: “a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people”

If you treat each person as someone made in the image of God, and as valuable, they will stick with you and serve as best they can for a long time to come. Affirm people by calling them up to the goodness of Christ within them, and don’t let them fall down to their lowest expectations of themselves.

Faithfulness: “We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments”

Many musicians struggle with being faithful, dependable and consistent. Help your musicians learn to “stick with it,” and remind them that loyalty to Jesus and to one another is a high calling. Call people up on coming late or disrespecting others’ time schedules when it harms others.

Gentleness: “not needing to force our way in life”

Teach your team to see the stage or platform as a vehicle to bring fame to God – not to themselves. If they see you calmly walking through life, trusting God without pushing for your own agenda, they may awake to the reality that they don’t need to push you or others to give them visibility or honour.

Self Control: “able to marshal and direct our energies wisely”

Ask God to enable you to call out the full potential of each band member. Help them to focus their energies and avoid “scattered living.” When certain areas of sin are acknowledged by the person, help them to walk the journey away from those areas as a mentor, intercessor and friend.

It is our ability to value one another, in the midst of laughter and labour, that makes a worship team into a true worship community, a true Kingdom tribe in the family of God.

2. Building Your Band Musically

Bringing your band together musically can be an entirely different matter than bringing them together spiritually. Hear these words from Vineyard worship leader Bruce Ellis:

“From a musical perspective, a worship team presents an interesting dilemma. Firstly, this is probably the only context where such a diverse group of musicians are gathered together and expected to produce a sound suitable for mass consumption. A worship team can, and often does, represent a wide mix of musical abilities and strengths – from the seasoned professional to those who have just learned a few chords. Since musicians naturally tend to gravitate toward those who share similar levels of ability, this integration can, if not kept in perspective, have some devastating effects on the worship team experience.

Factor in that many pastors, too often, closely correlate church growth with the worship team’s sound and you’ve got a breeding ground for division and contempt. That’s the bad news. The good news is that we can have confidence in the wonderful way God has both called us to, and provided the means by which, we can interact on both a spiritual and a musical level. If this sounds a lot like the Kingdom of God to you, you can rest in knowing ... it is!”¹⁸

Here are just a few tips to keep your band growing and working well together musically:

Allow time for band members to work out their parts for a particular song.

In rehearsal, it’s important for a musician to feel like they are contributing their best. Aid this by giving them the songs you’ll be leading earlier in the week, and by allowing them to work out their part during a rehearsal.

Make sure you are all in tune (maybe to the same tuner).

Don’t be proud about your ability to tune your instrument without a tuner. Most of the time, especially when playing with other musicians, it creates just enough sonic tension to make the music sound bad. Every band should have a tuner they share

around, and every musician should be humble enough to tune to it for the good of the band and the congregation – without having to be asked.

Give your team CDs to practice to well before they will do the songs in rehearsal.

While you never want your band simply mimicking CDs without ever catching the heart behind a song, CDs are a great tool for musicians (even professionals) to grow by. Drummers are pushed to play to the beat of a pro drummer, and to stay in time with the CD band. Electric guitarists are forced to play less, along with the guitarist on the recording, and to try new sounds. Vocalists learn new harmonies, keyboard players learn new sounds and textures, and worship leaders learn how to play their instrument!

Encourage, and even supply, lessons when possible.

This is all part of making your musicians feel like a valuable part of the team. When you can supply workshops for individual instruments, or send a musician for a few lessons with someone they admire, do it. Pick your investments wisely, and do all you can to encourage the musician in a craft they've been working on for years.

Expose them to greatness on their instrument.

If possible, have your band go to events together where great musicians are playing. Encourage them to watch what the players are doing, how little they are playing or how well they are blending in. The more you inspire your musicians, the more they will seek learning opportunities themselves.

Be brutally honest, and keep short accounts.

Being shy with musicians, while desirable in the short run, often leads to problems later. Be honest with where a musician is at, musically, spiritually or relationally. While not being overly-critical, extend love and grace in honest conversation about where a person is headed as a Christian (or as a musician). When love has ruled the day before, most musicians I know are eager for honest input.

Put like-abilities together.

If you have a few great musicians, give them plenty of opportunity to play together and be inspired by each other. If you only put learning musicians with your best musicians, the latter will get frustrated along the way. If a few musicians are growing together, have them play together and inspire one another to greater heights. Then, on occasion, mix the teams to create mentoring relationships. In some case, have younger musicians “shadow,” or play in the background with, your better musicians.

Rehearse well before you play.

Never apologise for rehearsing your band thoroughly, and for doing your best to create music that is beautiful together. Beautiful music facilitates worship; bad music distracts and disturbs people's interaction with God. The more rehearsed a band is together, the less they need to go over every little detail before an event. (On an added note, where there is little time to rehearse even previously familiar songs, “top and tail” the songs. In other words, practise how you will get into each song, how you will finish each song,

and then how you will start the next song after it, and so on. This is a quick way to rehearse when time is short.)

Obey the “Fraction Principle.”

Brian Doerksen, well-known worship leader and songwriter, emphasises the reality that the sound of every band should equal “1.” In other words, if there are 7 people playing in the band, each band member only plays 1/7 of what they *could* play if they were on their own. If each band member overplays, the sound ends up equaling 7 – a wall of busy sound will overwhelm the listener, and is closer to noise than it is music! If we each add our small part, making way for the other instruments in the band, we’ll play less, and more simply, than we would on our own. This is part of maturing as a musician, and as a band. The most professional of players and bands understand, and intuitively obey, this principle.¹⁹

C. Relating To Your Pastor

“I think the worship leader/pastor relationship is almost the most critical relationship in the Church, because the worship leader leads and holds out to the people this heart-theme of ‘When can I go and meet with God,’ and facilitates that heart connection corporately. The pastor provides an umbrella of authority in teaching the Word of God. If there’s any sort of strain or severing in that relationship, I believe it begins to affect the life of the entire church.

It really grieves me sometimes to have worship leaders pour out their heart to me, groaning ‘I can’t believe it, my pastor wants to have input into what songs we sing at church!’ I look at them and ask, ‘Why wouldn’t they?’ If they’re the shepherd, and they have a concern that you’re singing a song that is out there in left field theologically, why wouldn’t they want to come to you? It’s not like they’re coming and saying, ‘I’m going to tell you everything to do, and how to be creative,’ because that is not their gift. They’d be foolish to do that. But I think the pastor’s job is to impart their values and their heart, and then it’s up to the worship person to interpret that, and to serve that.

When those two things come together, I think you have not only a healthy church, but a growing, vibrant church leadership.”²⁰

Brian Doerksen

Always honour your pastor, in public and private.

Biblically, we are admonished to “...Respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you” (1Thess. 5:12 NIV). In both public and private, speak well of your leaders. In private prayer, pray for them in areas that you believe are blind spots. God may change them. He may also change you. He may change an entire congregation. Pray more than you say, and take your role as a

servant to your pastor. Your humility will inspire them to greater heights.

Put yourself in their shoes.

Every day, a pastor or leader carries a responsibility and calling to nurture the *whole* of the church they lead. They are aware of all the issues going on in the community, from the illnesses, to the fears, to the marriages, to the struggles and to the dreams of individuals. As worship leaders, we only see a small part of the church, and usually we affirm the people and ways of doing things that are most like us. Put yourself in your pastor's shoes, and help care for the community you share.

Serve the vision that your pastor has for the community.

Spend time, as friends with your pastor. Listen and ask questions about the vision for the community, and how you can lay down your life to serve that vision. The more the vision that God has spoken to your pastor for the community becomes your own, the greater the strength you will have ministering together to the church you serve.

Keep short accounts, and share honestly and humbly with one another.

Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Build your friendship with your pastor. Your ability to lead is based on your ability to keep relationships that are loving, honest and mutually submitted. Keep humility without apology, and confidence without arrogance, ever before you.

Love the church you lead.

If you don't love the community you lead, then either get out of the worship leading role or get on your face before God until you do love your church. When we are caught up in "us/them" language, we don't represent the heart of the Groom toward His Bride – the heart that sees all the wrinkles and blemishes, but lavishly loves anyway. Again, over time people will intuitively know if your worship leading is "taking" from them as an audience, or "giving" to them as a community. Most pastors have had to come to grips with this concept, and the sooner you do, the better for the whole team.

D. Mentoring Other Worship Leaders

Raising up worship leaders is both a relational and functional task. The following are just a few quick tips on how to facilitate the growth of a new worship leader:²¹

Co-Lead with Them

This gives them credibility before the congregation, and enables you to prepare, lead and de-brief together. Give them familiar songs to lead for six months to a year, so the congregation learns to trust them.

Spend Time with Them

If the leader is of the same sex, spend time with them doing spiritually important activities like watching a movie, eating food, laughing hard and listening well. If they are the opposite sex, involve others.

Take Your Time with Them

There is no rush. Give them a little bit of leading room over a long period of time. The issues of pride and identity are dealt with as you take the slow and steady route with a new worship leader.

Share Input with Them

When you lead together, help them choose songs, and show them how you organise the set. Assume that you actually know something about worship leading, and give confident guidance to their unique style.

Share Friends with Them

Expose them to your mentors via meals, meetings, seminars, DVDs, CDs, or other media. Set up times for others, like the pastor, to comment on their heart, style and skill growth.

Give Gifts to Them

Take a year, and put generosity into your budget. When you have it in your power, buy them gear or music items that remind them of their personal importance to you, and the investment you're willing to make. A simple pack of strings can go a long way in building your worship leader, and your friendship.

Give Hope to Them

Celebrate the hard process of growth and maturation with the new worship leader. Honestly, but lovingly, point them toward faithfulness above today's vision of "success." Have regular meetings to encourage and to guide them.

Chapter 3

Moving Forward As A Worship Leader

(How We Get Better At Leading Worship)

“I’ve heard some teaching recently about the investment and the enticement. God is trusting us with something in this generation. There’s a new wave coming in worship, and it’s exciting. You can catch a glimpse of it everywhere you go. But it’s a holy thing that we’re running with, so keep bowing down.

We keep seeing examples of people who’ve lost it. They’ve lost it with the Lord, and have disillusioned other people. So if God trusts you with something, just keep bowing down.”²²

Matt Redman

We never “arrive” as worship leaders. Every time we lead, we learn a little more, we sense a little more and hopefully, we grow a little more. Be a lifelong learner. Read books, like some of the one’s noted at the end of this chapter. Watch the *What Is Worship?*, *Leading Worship* and *Songwriting For Worship* DVDs (see *Additional Resources* at end) and do the study course with them. Watch those you respect as worship leaders, and take notes. Pursue higher education that will deepen you in spiritual leadership, formation, theology, history and creativity. Take every opportunity to become a more effective worship leader, musician and arranger, as well as becoming a well-read and thoughtful spiritual leader.

We want to move from being simply functional worship leaders, to becoming good worship leaders, to becoming great worship leaders. There are certain qualities that run like a thread through the lives of consistently effective and authoritative worship leaders. Here are a few thoughts from partnering with these worship leaders in interdenominational, intergenerational and international settings.

Note: *I must note here that not everyone is primarily called by God to be a worship leader. Some are primarily servants filling a need that energises them as well as serves a need. That’s a beautiful heart in action. Some are artists, serving as worship leaders. Nothing is better for an artist’s soul than to enjoy the full extent of one’s creativity and to lead people to God with accessible music. Others, though, are called to this type of ministry in the Church, and it is clear that the hand of God is on them to effectively and authoritatively lead worship. We can’t learn “calling;” we either are called to do it or we are not. Our gifting to lead worship will fall somewhere along a spectrum – embrace and pursue understanding as to where you are, and just be faithful. Listen closely to God, and the counsel of others, regarding your call to lead. Then, serve in whatever way you can, without insecurity or fighting for something that God isn’t giving. A servant with a role is still a servant. A servant without a role... is still a servant.*

A. Growing Toward Greatness

“Whatever your creative expression is, whether you’re a wordsmith, or a painter, a dancer or a songwriter, make it a significant and central part of how you communicate with God on your own. Real life will come to you from that place, though we sometimes separate our devotional experience from that creative aspect of who we are, because we haven’t been taught how to marry them together. Make your personal expression your devotional experience.”²³

David Ruis

How do you grow as a worship leader? The reality is that the more experience you gain leading worship, the more effective you can become. Sometimes however we reinforce bad habits over time, therefore a roadmap of some sort can be helpful.

There is no silver bullet for growth – growing as a disciple, growing as a spiritual leader, growing as a musician, growing as a pastor, growing as a lead worshiper, growing as a songwriter and growing as a human being all are factors in the development of a great worship leader. Every wedding you play at, funeral you sing for, and small group you lead into worship adds to your experience and wisdom base.

The old maxim states, “If you don’t have a target, you’re sure to hit it.” It does help our progress when we have a solid goal in mind. The following thoughts on what makes a good worship leader into a great worship leader will aid you in setting goals for your development.

Great Worship Leaders... are consistent.

Anyone can lead a great worship moment every once in awhile. The strongest worship leaders have a knack for consistently leading worship, in small groups, large groups, conferences, etc., in an effective and meaningful way.

Great worship leaders have learned how to build a worship set in a consistent and systematic way, without feeling like they’re quenching the Spirit of God if they prepare for spontaneity.

Great worship leaders are not afraid to do 6 or 7 songs over a half an hour, instead of stretching out 4 or 5. In other words, they know how to start and finish songs with confidence, and how to linger if the moment calls for it.

Great worship leaders know how to make the lion’s share of a set out of songs that are fresh yet familiar, God-centred and easily sung by all age groups.

Great worship leaders know how to finish a song without feeling a need to meander, and how to start another song with confidence.

Great worship leaders know how to gracefully transition between songs in a set, without jarring the congregation musically. Flow is important to them, and each song should prepare you, in some way, to engage with the next.

Great worship leaders know how to let the songs lead worship and give the worshiper language for worship. They feel no pressure to say-a-lot or pray-a-lot to keep energy flowing.

Great worship leaders know how to execute a set, without being too sensitive to, or influenced by, the faces or dispositions they see in the congregation.

Great worship leaders know how to choose the right song when asked to play for an offering, a funeral, or to end a conference with a time of celebration. They have a large, diverse catalogue of worship songs in their memory bank; not just in their song binder.

Great Worship Leaders... are equippers.

The most appreciated worship leaders have a streak of a trainer and mentor running through them. They are not content to have the platform all to themselves over a few years. They are always looking for those they can train, mentor and release, either inside or outside of that local congregation. They are secure in the gift they offer, and in the face of the gifts that others offer.

Great worship leaders know how to enjoy the process of building lifelong friendships with developing worship leaders – particularly those who value their input and share like-mindedness on key levels.

Great worship leaders know how to co-lead with someone, and how to pre-brief and de-brief while all the while sustaining a confident atmosphere for the developing worship leader.

Great worship leaders know how to mentor over time, without feeling any pressure to release people to lead worship before they are developed musically, emotionally or skillfully.

Great worship leaders are not afraid to address the pride that comes with both youth, and musical platform.

Great worship leaders are capable of listening to, and learning from, a younger leader.

Great worship leaders know how to invite a young worship leader to fall in love with the community which they lead, and to call them to either love the church they lead – or to step away from the microphone.

Great worship leaders know how to vulnerably share their story as a worship leader, and how to encourage younger leaders to learn from their mistakes.

Great worship leaders know how to become older brothers and sisters in worship leading, and not to simply protect themselves in the “always-leading” worship leadership role.

Great Worship Leaders... are pastoral.

These worship leaders have a wider skill-set than just playing an instrument, leading worship and leading a band. Most churches cannot afford such a limited capability in a new staff member. Most pastors and leaders I know are looking for worship leaders stirred by Kingdom passion, and motivated by pastoral love for the church.

Great worship leaders are flexible. They can lead worship in a home group, or lead the devotional time, or speak before the church on Sunday morning if asked. Great worship leaders know their scriptures, and know how to sensitively pray for a cancer patient in a hospital, and for a congregation in the midst of a building program.

Great worship leaders actually care for, and shepherd, their worship teams.

Great worship leaders “pastor” the congregation as they lead worship. It is clear to the church that the worship leader is not primarily in front to express his or her musical preferences in worship. There is a keen sense that the worship leader is there for *them* to have a meaningful connection with God.

Great worship leaders know when to ask someone to join a team, because their hearts are right, and how to ask someone to take a break because their hearts are askew from the central mandate of the team – to serve.

Great worship leaders read the scriptures, history, theology and classic Church writers in order to understand what makes and breaks the people of God. That learning finds its way into everything from the prayers uttered between songs, to the songs selected each set.

Great Worship Leaders... are proficient.

Worship leaders who play their instrument well have a much longer sustainability factor within a changing congregation than do those who are weak technically and cannot handle a diversity of demographic or need in a local community.

Great worship leaders are able on their instrument. They are not always the most proficient musician on the team; in fact, they are sometimes the least! However, they can lead the band confidently with what they do know.

Great worship leaders have just enough arranging ability to take a rag tag team, intuitively know what songs they can pull off smoothly, and what songs they simply cannot, and make them sound sweet together in simple arrangements.

Great worship leaders practise privately, and keep their own chops up personally or with lessons. They listen to fresh songs impacting the church, integrate them as possible, and learn musical ideas from them.

Great worship leaders love the old and the new, and seek to integrate the riches of the hymns of history with the jewels of contemporary worship music. They see the whole of church worship music, throughout the ages, as one body of work to be drawn on in appropriate occasions.

Great worship leaders have hundreds of songs in their mental arsenal, having led them over the course of many years. In a multi-church event, a spontaneous moment, or a ministry time, they can draw on a song that will fit the bill for the whole community.

Great worship leaders... understand authority.

These worship leaders understand what mutual submission is all about. They recognise the mantle that the lead pastor carries for the congregation, and they do all they can to defer to, and support, that leader.

Great worship leaders know how to honour time limits, ask teachable questions, and share the pastor's vision for the church in song selection and event preparation.

Great worship leaders do not push their way into worship leading or other roles – they offer their gifts, and then allow God to make a place for them to lead. They are not pushy or forceful – they are centred, and full of trust in God to make a place for their leadership.

Great worship leaders graciously receive input, and even pursue it – especially from the lead pastor and worshipers in the congregation.

Great worship leaders... are passionate.

The passionate will always lead, no matter the sphere or situation. Inspiring worship leaders carry a blend of passion and restraint in their toolbox. The leader's hunger for God, evidenced in an honest and vulnerable worship leading style, is irreplaceable, and evident to all. Many dispassionate worship leaders are hired because their musical skill level can cover up for a lack of personal passion as a worshiper.

At the same time that passionate worship is the hallmark of their leadership, great worship leaders are very keen in knowing when to push the envelope in worship, and when to hold back, even when their own emotions are running high.

Great worship leaders are exuberant, without becoming cheerleaders. In other words, they approach the moment of worship with enthusiasm, yet that enthusiasm is tempered with gentleness and a lack of need to generate outward emotion to feel that they've done their job.

Great worship leaders can separate their personal emotional state from what the moment calls for in the group they are leading (I don't know that this art is learned by any other mode than longevity of worship leading experience).

Great worship leaders love the secret place. These worship leaders will never let go of their personal, private times of worship before God. They understand that their authority as a worship leader is built on this ongoing integrity as a worshiper.

Great Worship Leaders... are committed to the community.

In other words, great worship leaders are intent on creating an effective space for people to meet with God through the medium of music, symbols (communion, etc.) and other means. Great worship leaders do not expect the congregation to be their captive audience for their own musical exploits.

Great worship leaders know that they are there for the community – the community is not just there for them.

Great worship leaders know how to discern the difference between a song that is a corporate worship song, and one that is an artist's expression. They are after the widest community encounter with God possible.

Great worship leaders can pull out a children's song, a celebrative song, an intimate ballad – whatever the congregational need requires.

While this is a short list of the key qualities to be sought after as we develop into the most effective lead worshipers, there are many others that expand on these. Make it your vision to be the most effective worship leader you know, making it easy for the heart cry of the community of God to find its way out of their hearts, and before the One they love. Then, train others around you to be great in the same high calling.²⁴

B. You've Chosen An Honourable Task

You've chosen an exciting and dangerous task. This little booklet is your survival manual. Do you accept your mission?

At the beginning of this booklet, we asked a few questions. What's so exciting about worship leading? Using the medium of the music we love, we have the privilege of leading people into the greatest adventure a human being can undertake – the journey to the heart of God.

What's so dangerous about worship leading? In a culture that idolises musicians and elevates emotions, we stand in front of people, behind a microphone, up on a stage, influencing people. Our own hearts sing louder than our musical instruments, and our true character touches people in ways we never before thought possible.

As you move forward as a worship leader, know that God and all of heaven will be behind you as you join the ranks of those who have chosen to honour God, and serve His people, by leading worship. From the passion within your heart, lead with skill, integrity, honesty and humility. Learn from your mistakes along the way, be teachable and humble, and expect God to deepen you as a person as He strengthens you as a lead worshiper.

Lead worship knowing that every person you lead, whether in a living room or in a stadium, was designed for this high privilege – to worship the living God.

Bless you as you rise to the privilege of leading worship in the beautiful part of the historic Body of Christ that is our Vineyard community.

C. Additional Resources For The Worship Leader

BOOKS

The following books speak to areas of worship leadership, leadership, church history, pastoral care, theology, biblical studies, creativity and postmodern reflection. Each is accessible to today's worship leader in thought and language.

Andy Park, *To Know You More: Cultivating The Heart Of The Worship Leader*, InterVarsity Press.

Augustine, *Confessions*, Spire.

Bill Jackson, *Quest For The Radical Middle*, VIP.

Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, Youth Specialties.

Carol Wimber, *The Way It Was*, Hodder & Stoughton.

Dan Wilt & Others, *Perspectives On Worship: Five Views*, Broadman Holman.

Don Williams, *Signs, Wonders And The Kingdom Of God: A Biblical Guide For The Reluctant Skeptic*, Servant Publications.

David Ruis, *The Worship God Is Seeking*, Regal Books.

Derek Morphey, *Breakthrough*, VIP.

Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, NavPress.

Gary Best, *Naturally Supernatural*, VIP.

John Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, Trafalgar Square Publishing.

John Wimber, *Power Healing*, Harper San Francisco.

John Wimber, *The Way In Is The Way On*, Ampelon Publishing.

Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story Of Christianity*, Prince Press.

Louth and Staniforth, trans., *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, Penguin Books.

Matt Redman, *FaceDown*, Regal Books.

Matt Redman, *The Heart Of Worship Files*, Regal Books.

Matt Redman, *The Unquenchable Worshipper*, Regal Books.

Mike Pilavachi, *Soul Survivor*, Regal Books.

N.T. Wright, *For All God's Worth*, Eerdmans.

Richard Foster and James Bryan Smith, eds. *Devotional Classics*, Harper Collins.

Roger Olson, *The Story Of Christian Theology*, InterVarsity Press.

Thomas a' Kempis, *The Imitation Of Christ*, Hendrickson Publishers.

Thomas Oden, *The Care Of Souls In The Classic Tradition*, Fortress Press.

Tim Hughes, *Here I Am To Worship*, Regal Books.

Vineyard Canada, *Back To Our Roots: Stories Of The Vineyard (An Interview With Carol Wimber)*, Vineyard Music Canada.

DVDS AND STUDY GUIDES

The following DVD and multi-media resources for worship leaders are all available through www.vineyardrecords.co.uk

What Is Worship? DVD

An expansive worship worldview training DVD with host Dan Wilt, N.T. Wright, Matt Redman, John Eldredge, Don Williams, Brian Doerksen, Tim Hughes, David Ruis, Kathryn Scott, Nigel Briggs, Derek Morpew, Peter Fitch, John Wimber and Peter Davids.

Leading Worship DVD

An introduction to the values and skills of an effective worship leader, with host Dan Wilt, Matt Redman, Brian Doerksen, Tim Hughes, Brenton Brown, Kathryn Scott and Andy Park.

Leading Worship Study Tools CD

An excellent 7-week PDF study guide for groups based on the DVD, including hundreds of articles, audio and video extras.

Songwriting For Worship DVD

An introduction to the values and skills of an effective worship songwriter, with host Dan Wilt, Matt Redman, Brian Doerksen, Tim Hughes, Brenton Brown, Kathryn Scott and Andy Park.

Songwriting For Worship Study Tools CD

An excellent 7-week PDF study guide for groups based on the DVD, including hundreds of articles, audio and video extras.

CD/DIGITAL AUDIO TRAINING

available at www.vineyardrecords.co.uk

Matt Redman: Back To The Heart

An audio interview on CD or iTunes between Dan Wilt and Matt Redman (*Heart Of Worship*)

N.T. Wright: Reclaiming Worship

An audio interview on CD or iTunes between Dan Wilt and N.T. (Tom) Wright (*Jesus And The Victory Of God*)

Brian Doerksen: Faithful One

An audio interview on CD or iTunes between Dan Wilt and Brian Doerksen (*Come, Now Is The Time*)

Tim Hughes: Keep It Real

An audio interview on CD or iTunes between Dan Wilt and Tim Hughes (*Here I Am To Worship*)

Kathryn Scott: Hungry For God

An audio interview on CD or iTunes between Dan Wilt and Kathryn Scott (*Hungry*)

Brenton Brown: Reign In Me

An audio interview on CD or iTunes between Dan Wilt and Brenton Brown (*Lord, Reign In Me*)

TRAINING MANUALS

available at www.vineyardrecords.co.uk

Play: *A Brief Guide To Playing Guitar.*

TRAINING ON THE WEB

Many other resources for building you and your team can be found at:

www.vineyardrecords.co.uk

www.songteach.co.uk

and

www.insideworship.com

HIGHER EDUCATION IN WORSHIP LEADERSHIP

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CREDITS

Images

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Photograph by Paul Preacher (www.paulpreacher.com)

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Back cover

Photographs by Vineyard Records UK

ENDNOTES

- 1 Brian Doerksen, Personal Interview, Winter 2000.
- 2 Andy Park, Personal Interview, Winter 2000.
- 3 This information is drawn from a variety of sources, including VineyardMusicUSA.org, VineyardChurchesUK.com, Vineyard.ca website and friends.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Dan Wilt, *Contemporary Worship, unpublished manuscript* (Nashville: Broadman Holman Publishers, 2006), 20.
- 6 Eugene Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 2054.
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- 11 Dan Wilt, "The Sound Of Your Life," in *Inside Worship Magazine: Walking In Holiness*, Vol. 46 (Feb. 2002), 6.
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- 19 Brian Doerksen, Personal Interview, Winter 2000.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Dan Wilt, "Mentoring A Worship Leader," in *Inside Worship Magazine: Building The Local Worship Experience*, Vol. 45 (Oct. 2001), 14.
- 22 Matt Redman, Personal Interview, Spring 1999.
- 23 David Ruis, Personal Interview, Spring 2003.
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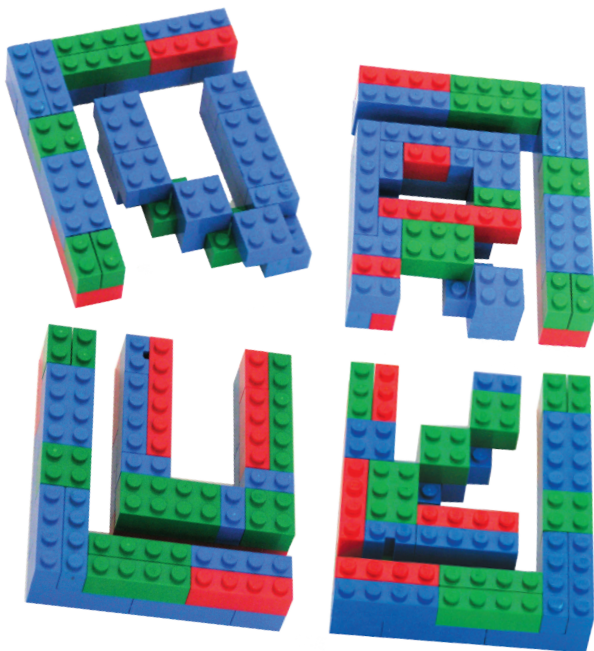
'Leading worship in the Vineyard' is a handy booklet containing a wealth of information about the origins and history of the Vineyard movement and the values that first underpinned the Vineyard approach to worship.

Including topics such as:

•**Our philosophy of leading worship** – as with any movement, the Vineyard has a distinct set of values which shape who we are and express the heart of worship that God has placed within us.

•**The practice of leading worship** – some practical guidance on leading a worship set, leading a band, relating to your pastors and mentoring other worship leaders.

•**How We Get Better At Leading Worship.**
– inspiration and encouragement for us to move forward in our worship leading. Also includes some information on useful resources.



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