

Worship Matters Video Intensive with Bob Kauflin
Session 3: Our Task (Part 1)
(From Chapters 6-8 of *Worship Matters*)¹
Transcript

Welcome to the third session of the Worship Matters Video intensive. In the first two sessions we looked at The Important Things: our hearts, minds, skills, and lives. In this session we're going to turn to what a worship leader is supposed to do, but before we dig in, I just want to mention a few disclaimers about that term, "worship leader."

I. Why "Worship Leader" Isn't a Helpful Term

When most people hear that phrase, "worship leader, they think of that person who stands in front of the church, leading the singing week after week. There are a number of drawbacks to that.

A. It's not a title that's used in Scripture.

You can look in vain through your Bible to find the phrase, "worship leader." I've heard some people suggest that we should add it to the list of gifts that the ascended Christ gave the church (Eph 4): the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, worship leaders. And I want to say that's a very bad idea. We don't want to add to God's eternal, unchanging word.

B. Jesus is our true worship leader.

The closest thing in Scripture we have to that phrase is the Greek word *leitourgos*, which is the Greek word for "public minister," and it's used of Jesus in Hebrews 8:2 when it talks about how he ministers in the heavenly places. Jesus, being fully God and fully man, is able to perfect all our offerings of worship to God and also communicate God perfectly and faithfully to us. So he really is our worship leader.

C. It makes it sound like worship is confined to singing.

Worship extends far beyond our singing to encompass not only our meetings, but our entire lives. It's a comprehensive term, it's an all-encompassing term that's meant to describe the way to respond to God in view of the mercies he's shown us in Jesus Christ.

II. Moving Beyond "Worship Leader"

So, a couple thoughts about that phrase, "worship leader" before we dig in.

A. Use different terms (music pastor, song leader, congregational worship leader, lead musician, leader of worship in song, music guy)

First, I'm going to use suggest we use different terms—along with the phrase “worship leader” because I'll continue to use it—but there are other ways we can describe this activity. That person can be a:

- Music pastor
- Song leader
- Congregational worship leader
- Lead musician
- Leader of worship in song
- Or my favorite, just the music guy

In reality, anybody who knows God through Jesus Christ and is seeking to help others know him and love him more is a worship leader.

B. Can be fulfilled by more than one person.

The second point I want to make is that planning and leading songs doesn't have to be the responsibility of just one person. So when I use that phrase, “worship leader” or similar phrase, I might be speaking of one individual, or a group of people. What I want to do is establish biblical goals for leading the gathered church.

Humanly speaking, the pastor is the “worship leader” for a church. They will give an account to God for the people that they shepherd. But my book and this intensive is for anyone who is part of the process of planning and leading the gatherings of the church. So whether you bear the final responsibility or not, my prayer is that this intensive will equip you and encourage you to serve well for the praise of the savior.

C. A proposed definition.

So with that intro, here's a definition of a worship leader that I came up with a number of years ago, helped by my good friend Jeff Purswell, and it's what I think of to kind of summarize what I'm seeking to do, and what I think we should be seeking to do, any time we're in front of the church, leading them on a Sunday morning. This is the definition:

***A faithful worship leader
magnifies the greatness of God
in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit
by skillfully combining God's Word with music,
thereby motivating the gathered church to proclaim the gospel,
to cherish God's presence, and to live for God's glory.***

Now in the next number of sessions, I'm going to be unpacking that definition, digging down deep into it to discover more of what God would have us think about and aim for as we seek to lead his people.

III. A faithful worship leader...

So we start with a faithful worship leader. Now when people hear the phrase “worship leader” they often think of someone who’s young, energetic, has an incredible voice, writes their own songs, is witty, and looks good on camera. (Not the person who’s talking to you now.)

Those aren’t necessarily bad qualities, but they’re not where God starts. A leader is called to be faithful. In speaking of his own ministry, Paul says this in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 1-2:

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.”
- 1 Corinthians 4:1–2²

A. Called to be Stewards

Now, we’re not apostles and we didn’t write the New Testament, but we share this with Paul: we are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

A steward managed the household of another. He didn’t exercise his own initiative, or impose his personal authority. His only task was to do whatever his master wanted him to do. We have a job to do and God wants us to be faithful to do it.

Now because “worship leader” is such a common phrase and it isn’t a biblical leadership position, we tend to make up the job description and we have a lot of examples of that. I’ve seen churches advertise for someone who can lead them into the throne room, who follows the flow of the Spirit, who brings down God’s presence: those aren’t God’s requirements for leaders in the church, nor do they describe what he wants us to do.

B. The Mysteries of God

What he wants us to do is proclaim and steward the “mysteries of God.” Now the “mysteries of God” isn’t something that we can’t figure out. The “mysteries of God” is the Bible’s way of talking about the gospel, revealed by the Spirit, the good news that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh to die as our substitute, receive God’s punishment for our sins, and reconcile us to God. That’s the “mysteries of God.” It’s the power of God and the best thing we can offer those we lead. So however we serve as a leader, we’re required to be stewards of the gospel.

That means in the midst of learning songs, broadening our understanding of technology, working out the structure of our services, understanding our cultural context, seeking to do what we do with excellence, we want to be sure that we’re being faithful to make the gospel clear and compelling.

C. The Real Judge

Paul goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 4:4 that he is ultimately accountable to the Lord for what he does. "It is the Lord who judges me," he says. That means none of us are responsible to people for what we do and it means that God is looking for something specific: faithfulness. None of us are going to hear on the last day, nor do we want to hear, "Well done, good and innovative servant. Well done, popular servant. Well done, good and creative servant, culturally relevant servant. Well done, best-selling servant. Well done, hip servant. Well done, technologically ahead-of-the-pack servant." We're not going to hear that. We want to hear is, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

It's not that creativity, cultural relevance, and the wise use of technology are bad. They're not. They just aren't the ultimate measure of success in God's eyes and they shouldn't be the ultimate measure of success in our eyes either.

So we want to be faithful servants, faithful worship leaders.

IV. ...magnifies the greatness of God...

So what are we seeking to do? Well, a faithful worship leader magnifies the greatness of God. What does God want us to do when we stand in front of people? Magnify his greatness and that begins with helping people see that the most important thing about their lives, the most important thing about the world, indeed all of history, is God.

David says in Psalm 34:1-3

*"I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, **magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!**" - Psalm 34:1-3*

David has a passion and we should share that passion. It's to magnify the Lord and he invites others to do it with him. Magnify the Lord with me! When we use the word magnify, we aren't talking about God in a way a microscope does – making something very small visible - but in a way a telescope does, making something that appears small more in proportion to what it really is. So when we go to the beach or camping and there isn't ambient light around and we look up into the heavens and we see the thousands of stars, they're just twinkling like little lights and you know if you just hold up your thumb, you can block them out. Many of those stars are millions of times bigger than our sun, but they appear very small to us. Well that's how it often is with our thoughts of God. God appears very small and we want to magnify him.

Pastor and writer John Piper says it this way:

"We are not called to be microscopes, but telescopes. Christians are not called to be con-men who magnify their product out of all proportion to reality, when they

know the competitor's product is far superior. There is nothing and nobody superior to God. And so the calling of those who love God is to make his greatness begin to look as great as it really is." - John Piper³

Do you see the difference? God's not small—he's big! And we want to help people understand that.

Psalm 145:3 says,

"Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable." - Psalm 145:3

And yet one of the greatest challenges we face in our lives is forgetting how great God really is, and he looks so small compared to our trials, and our challenges, and our fears, and our sins, and our doubts.

So, our job is to magnify God's greatness in people's minds and hearts and wills. We're going to talk about some of the ways we can do that. We want to speak to people's perceptions of God and their passions for God.

A. Right perceptions of God

Our perceptions of God are often the result of our own opinions and circumstances. We figure, "God must be like this because I'm going through this," but that's not the way we determine who God is. And God hasn't left us clueless as to who he is. In Scripture, God is praised for his greatness in his Word, his worthiness, and his works and by pointing to those, we can help magnify God in people's minds and hearts and wills.

- His Word:

"In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?" - Psalm 56:10–11

We also have Psalm 19 and Psalm 119, which are both profound and inspiring meditations on the riches of God's Word. We magnify God in people's eyes by reminding them of his Word.

- His Worthiness:

"Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!" - Psalm 117

In other words, there are reasons to praise the Lord. Scripture never tells us to praise the Lord without giving us reasons to, and here we see that. Because God's steadfast love toward us is great and his faithfulness endures forever, he is worthy.

- His Works:

“I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.” - Psalm 77:11–12

We will spend eternity being caught up in God’s mighty deeds. We can praise him for his works of creation, sovereignty, provision, providence, judgment, and more, but above all these—what surpasses them all—is God’s work of redemption and reconciliation that he accomplished in his son through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But, we’re going to take the whole next session to talk about that, so I’m just going to leave it there for now.

B. Right Passions for God

So, we want to give people right perceptions of God, but we also want to speak to their passion for God. We want people to perceive God rightly, but that’s not all. We’re not just listing characteristics about God, as impressive as they might be. We want people to be moved by them. We want to affect not only their perceptions, but their passions. We want them not only to know how great God is, but to love him because he is so great and there are different ways we might do that.

At times we might express our sheer delight in knowing a God whose greatness and goodness extend beyond our ability to express it. That’s a love for God that just comes through in awe and amazement and wonder. Other times our passions might go towards yearning to know God better. *We want to know you, O God, show yourself to us, reveal yourself more, we long to know you better.*

Now, we want to be sure that crying out to God to show himself to us doesn’t lead people to think that God hasn’t already shown himself to us in his living and written Word but it’s an aspect of magnifying God to say to him, “We need you more. We love you and want know you better.” We also express God’s greatness by obeying him. It brings no glory to God to say we’re grateful he’s forgiven us for our sins but have no corresponding desire for holiness and obedience. So, we sing songs that express a desire to obey him, our commitment to love and obey him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We sing phrases like:

*In all I do, I honor you, or
I worship you with all my heart, or
Use my ransomed life in any way you choose*

Now it can seem like we’re overstating things sometimes. Are we being hypocritical to say things like that? *Lord, I’m going to follow you with all my heart.* Well, no. I mean it can be, but we can also be reminding ourselves of who we are in Christ and that our greatest desires are to

serve him and love him and follow him with all our hearts. I found what Hymn writer Isaac Watts said hundreds of years ago to be helpful. He says,

“We can never be too frequent or too solemn in the general surrender of our souls to God and binding our souls by a vow to be the Lord’s forever: to love him above all things, to fear him, to hope in him, to walk in his ways in a course of holy obedience, and to wait for his mercy unto eternal life.” - Isaac Watts, A Guide to Prayer, p. 28⁴

Finally, we show God’s greatness by expressing our trust in his faithfulness in the midst of our trials, doubts, and fears. Life doesn’t always go in the way we think it should. So, how do we magnify God in the midst of very challenging, difficult times? Well, simply rehearsing our problems in the midst of them doesn’t magnify God. Recalling his character does; reminding ourselves of who he is, what he’s promised, and what he’s done for us in Jesus Christ. It stirs our hearts and it’s in the middle of recognizing things aren’t the way they should be that we cry out to God and say, “But Lord, we know you are this way.” This is what the Psalmist is doing in Psalm 77. This is the kind of “lament” that brings glory to God. This is Psalm 77:7-9. He’s experiencing a difficult time and he says,

“Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” - Psalm 77:7–9

See the psalmist is seeing a disconnect. His life isn’t lining up with who he knows God to be and so he reminds himself. He goes to God with his questions and expresses confidence later in the Psalm that God will be true to his Word.

So in all these ways and more, we’re seeking to magnify God’s greatness, goodness, and glory in people’s minds, hearts, and wills and what a privilege it is!

But we’ll find out in the next session, it’s not something we can do on our own. It takes God to worship God.

Session 3 Discussion Questions:

1. How does the content of this session challenge popular concepts of the “worship leader”? How does it challenge your own personal concept of a worship leader?
2. The Bible calls us to be faithful when it comes to leading God’s people in corporate worship. What are things you are tempted to be motivated by instead of seeking to be faithful?
3. What does it look like to be faithful in your present role? How would you like to grow?
4. What are some things you can do to seek to see more of the greatness of God?
5. Our purpose is to “magnify the greatness of God” through our leadership and our songs. On any given Sunday in your church, how do you think people are viewing God as they walk in to church? What are some practical ways you can magnify (or help them see) the greatness of God through your leading?

¹ *Worship Matters* by Bob Kauflin, © 2008 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

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⁴ From *A Guide to Prayer* by Isaac Watts, p. 28. Public Domain.