

Worship in Spirit and truth

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.

John 4: 23

This is from a well-known passage where Jesus is talking to a Samaritan woman by a well. He tells her that true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth. Of course, we know that when the bible talks about worship, it doesn't just mean singing songs on a Sunday, but the actions of our lives as we live them out as God's creations. But what exactly does this passage mean for us in our roles in church? How does that apply to us as members of the music ministry and what can we learn from it?

Well, Jesus says God seeks worshippers, not worship. Worship is what we *do*, but being worshippers is who we *are*. God knows that if we work on becoming the best possible worshippers, then whatever we offer as worship will be pleasing to Him. Sometimes we can get preoccupied with what our worship looks and sounds like without really thinking about where our worship is coming from. We should be examining what the state of our heart is when we are worshipping, not the state of our worship itself.

Secondly, we should notice that Jesus describes *true* worship as being in Spirit and truth. To worship in truth is to assign proper value and worth to something. To worship in truth is to understand who God is – the God of the bible, creator of the universe and who sent His son Jesus to die for our sins. It's deeply rooted in scripture with a firm understanding of whom we are worshipping and why He is worthy of that praise.

To worship in Spirit is to engage our hearts fully in that praise. When we come into a relationship with God, our lives and hearts should be transformed through the Holy Spirit at work in us. It is through this transformed heart that our praise should emanate from. Our worship should not just be from our head, but from our hearts too. It is beyond the physical. It's a spiritual and emotionally engaging effort.

Lastly, it's important to stress that Jesus says we should worship in Spirit *and* truth. We should be mindful of both in our worship ministry and many churches take their eye off this fact and make it about worshipping in Spirit *or* truth. They may favour one over the other, and this is something we need to watch out for in our ministry. But what does that look like exactly?

Worshipping with all head and no heart

Worshipping with your head and no heart can be an easy place to find yourself as a worship musician. It's easy to go through the motions of worship without any of the emotional engagement that should come with it. This may not have always been the case when you've been serving in church, and it may not be a problem every week, but if you notice it happen, it is something that can be fixed! What do we need to watch out for and what can we do to bring ourselves back into a place of passionate service if we notice something wrong?

Our worship should go beyond the stage on Sunday – When we sing on stage, the lyrics should mean something, not only because they're true, but that they're true in *our lives*. We should be taking these themes, lyrics and ideas that we sing about on Sundays and applying them in our weekly lives in the world. Sometimes if we worship with our heads and not our hearts, we might agree with what we're singing but not feel like we're really living it out when we leave church. If you find this happening, pray for more of the Holy Spirit in your life. Try to connect with God daily and think about His word often. We all have busy lives and I know it can be hard at times, but a spiritually deep worship ministry is built on spiritually deep people.

It can sometimes feel like we're going through the motions – Worshipping with all head and no heart can sometimes feel like we're just going through the motions. We can end up singing songs in our services, not because we're leading people in worship of God and engaging with the Holy Spirit, but because it's what we do at church every week. We can choose songs because they're on our church's song list, not because they'd suit that week's service. If we find ourselves serving out of obligation or feel like we're on auto-pilot sometimes, we need to take a step back and remember the joy of when we first stepped into ministry. For many people, when they first join the music team, it's an exciting time. Everything feels new and fresh and we're excited about serving God and the church. We need to remember just what a joy it is to serve and use our talents. In extreme circumstances it's sometimes beneficial to step back for a season and regroup, but often we can get back on track by praying that God would re-ignite that passion we first had when we started serving in worship ministry.

Letting the Holy Spirit lead the worship, not us – Worshipping solely with our heads can often mean we're reluctant to really 'let go' in our worship time. Worshipping in spirit involves trusting the Holy Spirit to lead your worship, and not just following the run sheet on Sunday come-what-may. This doesn't mean that the whole thing should be some kind of free-for-all with no songs chosen and no plan for Sunday before the day itself. Rather it should mean that we should be open to the idea that the Holy Spirit may lead your service in a different direction sometimes. This could be a reaction to the sermon, or it may be a culmination of things happening in the lives of people in the congregation over several weeks. If you feel confused as to what part the Holy Spirit plays in worship or what it even feels like for the Holy Spirit to move in your services, it's good to get back to basics. Read your bible to try and get a better understanding of the Holy Spirit; listen to videos or podcasts; talk to your leaders; pray for God to help you get a better insight. If we understand what worshipping in the Spirit is ourselves, then we can lead other people to worship in the Spirit more easily too.

Worshipping with all heart and no head

On the other side of the spectrum is worshipping with a great amount of emotion and passion, but without the grounding that comes from the truth behind it. It may look great on stage but it's the kind of worship that places more value on feelings than on faith. It's equally easy to find ourselves struggling with some of the issues here and, if the section above didn't speak much to the problems you may have faced over the years, maybe this next section will.

It sometimes places a disproportionate value on the performance and staging – Worshipping solely with our hearts and emotions can lead to the kind of service that looks fantastic on the surface but with the congregation being moved more by the playing and stage set-up than by the spiritual act of coming into God's presence. It's great to put on a fantastic show in church, especially for special services like Christmas or Easter, but we always need to remember why we're doing it. If we find ourselves getting lost in lighting cues, backing tracks, stage set-up or fancy arrangements, just take a step back and ask yourself if you're making each decision for the benefit of leading the congregation in worship. If you are, great! There are many outpourings of praise in the bible that sound magnificent and grand and we shouldn't be afraid of ever trying something big in our services. But if you feel maybe you're doing things in your service more for the spectacle, take a step back and bring your concerns to God. In terms of leading your team, it can be as easy as grounding them by starting every practice or planning meeting in prayer. Personally, it's asking God daily to keep us grounded in our ministry and asking for the wisdom to make choices based on serving the church first and foremost.

It can be exhausting – Worshipping solely with our emotions can be draining. If our worship is not coming from being filled with the Holy Spirit but from our own abilities, we're relying on our own musicianship to lead people into an atmosphere of praise, not on the Holy Spirit to engage with people. Sometimes this can even lead us into a place where we rate the effectiveness of our music ministry with how many people cried or broke down on a Sunday. This can be emotionally exhausting and eventually takes its toll on us as performers. The bible tells us again and again that our strength comes from God, and He's the one we should be leaning on in our ministry. We should come to lead our congregations in worship with an open mind about how the Holy Spirit will move amongst the congregation and a willingness to be flexible in the way we perform. We need to be constantly asking God for more wisdom in our playing and leading on a Sunday. We need to ask Him for a greater ability to sense when to take our music up or down in order to lead our congregations better. Not to engineer an artificial emotional response through our playing, but a genuine one through the Holy Spirit.

It can value team members in the wrong way – Leading an effective worship ministry is a balancing task of using the right people in the right way. It's really exciting when we get a great musician joining the music team at church, especially on an instrument that you don't have at the moment. After all, with a great band it's a lot easier to make great music. We just need to make sure that we don't lose sight of the fact that a solid worship ministry is built on people who have not only have the ability to play and sing well, but also have the spiritual maturity to be part of a visible ministry, leading people into the presence of God. We need to make sure that we cultivate both of these things in our ministry and not to overly value one over the other. Sometimes if we rely on our emotions rather than our faith in worship

ministry, it can be tempting to use a great musician who is maybe not ready yet to step on stage spiritually yet. That's not to say that we need to start refusing people joining the team that don't meet our spiritual standards, but we need to make sure that we don't rush people onto stage on a Sunday because we need them to plug a gap. Mid-week practices are a great place for people to start to play with the team and grow as followers of Jesus and, when they are ready, they can take the next step up as mature leaders into active service. Encouraging each other as a team to grow in our faith is the foundation of a great music ministry. We should be helping each other in our walks with God. We should be invested in each other's lives and trying to help grow each other's faiths by sharing what God is doing in our lives. Above all we should be praying for each other and growing in fellowship.

In summary

Being a member of the worship ministry in a church a great privilege. It can be one of the most rewarding things to serve God by doing something that we love, and to lead others whilst we're doing it. We need to remember, however, that God is not interested primarily in the worship we offer Him, but the worshippers themselves. We need to be mindful of some of the pitfalls and stumbling blocks that we could face in ministry and how to realign ourselves if we feel we've strayed from our calling. We need to root ourselves in God's word and cultivate a deep understanding of who He is and what He has done for us. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and minds. We need to remember whom we are worshipping and why. If we do all this then our worship will be transformed in our services and our congregations.