

Leading a Congregation

Whether you're leading with a full band on a Sunday morning or standing on your own in a prayer meeting or Life Group, your calling is the same: to help people respond to God.

While the skills involved in leading a band and leading a congregation often overlap, there are plenty of occasions where you'll be doing one without the other. In every context, our role is far more than choosing songs or singing well. We are helping shepherd God's people as they worship him.

Shepherding the Flock

One of the greatest responsibilities of a worship leader is simply paying attention.

It's easy to become absorbed in chord charts, lyrics or wondering what comes next, but good worship leaders learn to lead with open eyes and open ears.

With open eyes, look for what God may be doing in the room. Much of his work is invisible, but sometimes you catch glimpses of it. Notice how people are responding. Be aware if a band member is struggling, if the meeting leader wants to communicate something, or if your sound engineer is trying to get your attention.

Lead with open ears too. Listen to the prayers being prayed, the Scriptures being read, prophetic contributions, or what the congregation is expressing to God. If you use in-ear monitors, make sure you can still hear the room ('crowd, ambient, room' microphones will help you do this). Worship leading isn't simply about producing sound; it's about discerning what God may be doing among his people.

Using Scripture

Scripture is our greatest tool as worship leaders.

The Bible tells us who God is, what he has done, and who we are because of Christ's finished work. As our understanding of God grows, so does our worship. As J.I. Packer wrote, "Theology is for the purpose of doxology". We respond in worship to the revelation of God.

Rather than reaching for your own thoughts, let God's Word shape the how you lead and the content of your interactions with the congregation. The truth contained within a well-chosen verse, shared at the appropriate time, has a unique power to encourage faith, bring freedom and draw people out towards wholehearted worship.

It's worth memorising a few short passages of Scripture that you could share at various times throughout a set. Keeping Bible references alongside your chord charts can be incredibly helpful to save you scrambling through your Bible in the moment.

Using Your Words

It might sound obvious, but as worship leaders, we're allowed to speak to the congregation. I have sometimes wrongly thought that it's not 'my job' to speak to the congregation. What I am here for is to sing!

Our encouragements should be shaped by the gospel, not by hype. It's tempting to try to generate energy by saying things like, "Come on, sing louder!" or "Let's see those hands!" While those comments might increase visible participation, they don't necessarily exhort people to genuine worship.

The gospel does that.

Instead of telling people to be more enthusiastic, remind them why they have every reason to worship; why it is fitting and right for them to worship; why they can express joy filled, exuberant, authentic worship.

If they are in Christ, they have been totally forgiven for their sins. They have been welcomed into God's family. Their sin is remembered no more. Their guilt has been removed from them as far as the east is from the west. They were once dead but now, in Christ, they are alive. Christ has made a way for them to freely approach God with confidence.

Give people a gospel reason to sing! When people behold the finished work of Christ more clearly, worship becomes the natural response.

Communication Skills

I'm not fond of the phrase *stage presence* when talking about corporate worship because we're not performers. We are not here to act our way through a set-list. Our aim isn't to command a stage.

But we have been given the responsibility to lead people. I've found good communication is an essential part of good leadership.

Are you speaking clearly? How's your diction? How's your microphone technique? Do you make eye contact with those you're leading or are you hiding behind a music stand? When did you last think about your posture and body language. Do you look engaged? Approachable? Joyful?

Our expressions, gestures and posture all communicate something to those we're leading before we've even said a word. If we're singing about the joy of the Lord, it shouldn't look like we'd rather be somewhere else.