

Worship

**Principles and
Reality**

First published in 2014

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A Brief Introduction

Worship is anything that leads to an encounter with God, but praise is the gateway to opening up the amazing. Psalm 22:3 says “Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; You are the one Israel praises.” Praise rolls out the red carpet for God – it provides a gateway for the King of Kings to come.

This book is about worship: its purpose; how it affects the individual; how it affects a corporate body of people; how it affects the spiritual realm. It is not meant to be exhaustive or all inclusive but it *is* God-focussed and it adds ever so slightly to what millions of people through thousands of years have discovered, including those in the Bible.

There is a great deal more to worshipping God than we possibly realise – and it’s *certainly* more than singing on a Sunday - and this adoration of Him can affect atmospheres, spirits of both good and evil, and situations.

With help and examples drawn from the Bible this book will perhaps shed a little more light on the role of worship in the church and in the soul, what affects this and how the spiritual realm is affected.

Worship...What Worship?

We need to expand our idea of worship...

In a church you worship God, sing hymns and/or choruses which declare God's victory, love, power etc. - and those who do that already know a degree of what they are singing about. Dependent on certain styles, denominations (which God never intended!) and attitudes, most of us have experienced it in one way or another - however this is quite narrow way of looking at a lifestyle.

Worship should be a way of life, a constant worshipping attitude and the way in which we can begin to understand more about how God really wants us to be for Him. Worship is more of an attitude than an action, although it is both.

...and understand that it can extend far beyond the obvious. If you're expressing a reverence and devotion to God it can be through painting, song writing, poetry, dancing, drawing, mime, meditation, appreciation, creating...in fact a whole lot of things. That's part of worship. But it's the *attitude* and the *spirit* that count. God gave you *you*; you're just giving that back to Him as an offering - however that is still limiting the idea of worship and its true capacity.

In Genesis God tells of the creation of the universe when man had a perfect walk with God. For a while, Adam and Eve had the privilege of knowing God's peace and fullness in perfection and they very probably showed God their respect and love for Him by worshipping Him; there is every indication that they were created to praise God (Isaiah 43:7), considering they were made in God's image and therefore an expression of perfection. But this included a *lifestyle* of living according to God's will, revering Him at every opportunity and enjoying a relationship with Him. After all, they knew of nothing *other* than relationship with Him and daily worship would have seemed utterly normal to them. Unfortunately that attitude of worship was corrupted by Satan's lies - and one instance of failing to worship God resulted in huge consequences. That one mistake removed all of us from a normal, daily, worshipful relationship of oneness with God, to a separated relationship where choice and failure plague us.

The emphasis which God places on worship is evident in John 9:31 "If any man is a worshipper of God and does His will, He hears him."

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 we are exhorted “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”. Praising God in all circumstances entails telling God that you recognise His sovereignty in all your situations – both when things are going well and when it looks like they could not get any worse. (That is not to say that you should praise God *for* all things. That is an entirely different, almost defeatist view that you’re happy with what you’ve got - and even if you’re not, you’ll put up with it). If we are always open to God and the fact of His omnipresence, it necessarily follows that we are always mindful of Him. That means that the deeper our understanding of God, the more we are aware of His requirements and ideals. In other words, the deeper our understanding of God, the deeper our worship.

The Bible encapsulates it: worship is a way of living, not just a Sunday morning excursion into Praiseland. When the Bible says “Pray at all times” in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, it doesn’t mean closing your eyes and concentrating for 24 hours a day. What it means is to do His will and always be open to God; to always understand that He can talk to you, teach you things, love you and be with you *whenever He wants*; if you maintain a continual attitude of openness to Him.

God will not always force His way into your little organised world if it’s so organised that you have not left Him a space. We can have the busiest day’s schedule in the World and God can still talk to us if we acknowledge that He is in control. All we have to do is understand that He’s there with us while we’re rushing around... saying “Help me Lord, I don’t want to be doing this”, or simply saying thank you when something goes right - acknowledging that God is ever present and at the forefront of our day. Being mindful of God worships Him and it means we learn to consider Him in all things. Being *mindful* of God in the trivial things (“I’m looking for a new car/I want to buy item X/we want to go on holiday to place Y) puts God at the centre of them. We don’t paralyse ourselves by waiting for Him to make our decisions for us, but we acknowledge His sovereignty and our worship of Him over our *entire* life.

If you’re driving somewhere and you realise that you haven’t spoken to God for a while, turn off the music and just chat to Him...not necessarily for long, but just to acknowledge He’s there and part of what you’re doing. If He wants to speak, He can; however the sheer act of turning off the music is a tiny sacrifice (actually quite a large a sacrifice to some) – but one that shows God is front and centre. Or take a part of a regular journey you make and use that time to commune with

God. It's a very small act of worship but the key lies with giving God the recognition He deserves and the understanding that we are in His hands – that we adore Him.

Matthew Henry's concordance says of 1 Thessalonians 5:17: "The way to rejoice evermore is to pray without ceasing. We should rejoice more if we prayed more. The meaning is *not* that men should do nothing but pray, but that nothing else we do should hinder prayer in its proper season. Prayer will help forward and not hinder all other lawful business and every good work"

Substitute the word 'worship' in the commentary above for the word 'pray' and the concept becomes clearer. It is a constant, meaningful state of mind and, if we don't always feel that God is particularly communicative or close, it then becomes a choice. *Obviously* worship is partially verbal – and it is two-way. It is telling God that he *is* God and giving Him utmost say in your life and experiences, even if you don't want to, or don't feel like it. God can cope with you having a rant at Him but you then need to be open to receiving what He wants to say in return.

"The way to rejoice evermore is to **worship** without ceasing. We should rejoice more if we **worshipped** more. The meaning is *not* that men should do nothing but **worship**, but that nothing else we do should hinder **worship** in its proper season. **Worship** will help forward and not hinder all other lawful business and every good work" (with apologies to Mr Henry).

Live a worshipful *lifestyle* and allow God to challenge you. What, through your daily life, is God saying you and how are you growing with Him?

Our Response

The way we react to situations and demonstrate our respect for God is a part of worship - we can worship God by our actions and in our attitudes to one another.

A Christian friend has a reasonable issue with a work colleague and has had for some time...it's not important to expand on it – but he struggles with this person's attitudes, apparent selfishness, rudeness and borderline bullying. Despite challenging it, not much has changed over a long time period and the easiest thing in the world would be to retaliate, make life difficult, mentally torture him at night and stir up other people against the offender in his cause. But that's not God's way. God doesn't give us that option if we want to honour Him. Instead He says to bless your enemy in Proverbs 25:22, heaping burning coals on their head. My friend has been doing this for quite some time and God is moving spectacularly slowly in this situation. So what should he do? Matthew 5:44 - pray for them! Does he want to? No! But he has a choice: trust that God is taking this situation *exactly* as He wants and do what He says (even though it's the last thing my friend wants to do); maintain a holy attitude, acknowledge that God loves and cherishes this person as much as He loves and cherishes my friend! Does he get it right all the time? Absolutely not; does he *try* to get it right? Yes – and *that* is part of his worshipping God.

Sometimes what we *don't* do or say honours God more than what we *do* say or do. If, out of godly love and sensitivity for another person we *don't* mention something or choose *not* to do something, we demonstrate a silent love which Matthew 6:4 says "...will be a private matter. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you".

Did you *need* to repeat story X?

Would it have been better *not* to have challenged that person/had argument Y, even if you *were* right?

Was your description of X *really* loving?

Would the most loving thing be to *not* speak up?

Were you *actually* being a bit manipulative in situation Y?

Do you actually need to say what you're going to say (when actually, truth be known, it has a bit of an edge to it) or should you, for the sake of an honest and worshipful relationship with God, *KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT*!?

What was your attitude when you said *that* thing...honestly?

Subtlety in various situations, your willingness to be open to God and thus hear from Him is a form of worship.

We have different rules to people who are not Christians and, in sporting terms, that does not make a level playing field. We have to forgive and keep forgiving. We have to love and keep on loving. We *act* according to God's will, we do not (should not!) *react* according to situations, regardless of what other people (Christian or not) do. It can feel like we've got one hand tied behind our back. It can feel unfair. And we should not dwell in and/or on the hurt that we feel others have caused us. This in itself is a form of wresting control from God.

Fortunately (to continue the sporting analogy), God is our referee and will *always* act in perfect love as He sees fit, and honour our actions and Godly intentions. We *must not* judge other people, or try to do God's job for Him because we don't have His insight, plan or knowledge. That does not mean that the situation will resolve in the way we want...it might even get worse. However, if we are right with God, God will ensure that the right thing happens in *His* timeframe, on *His* terms – even if we can't immediately see that. And *God's* perspective is all that matters.

We should not divide these situations up into 'Christian' and 'not Christian'. God works through us regardless and we can (should) ask God for wisdom, insight and knowledge whomever we deal with. Consider Daniel 2:20-33, where Daniel praises God for the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Nebuchadnezzar was ambivalent towards God, but that did not mean that God couldn't affect him through Daniel. Daniel's obedience, trust and focus on God, and the fact that it was irrelevant to him that Nebuchadnezzar did *not* love God, had such a profound effect on Nebuchadnezzar that his ambivalence changed to a proclamation that Daniel's God was the greatest of all gods!

Nebuchadnezzar then decided to build a gold statue and force everyone to bow down to it, completely ignoring/missing the point of Daniel's interpretation and setting himself up against God. It took Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and God's angel to bring Nebuchadnezzar to his senses for a while – but *Daniel was not responsible for the way Nebuchadnezzar reacted*; he just interpreted a dream as God gave it to him. Daniel was responsible for *himself*, the words and wisdom he received from God and his personal attitudes and reactions to *however* Nebuchadnezzar

responded. Nebuchadnezzar's response, whether Godly or not, reasonable or otherwise, was *God's* problem. *It was none of Daniel's business.*

Imagine having a word from God for someone who does not know Him and then giving that word. Your responsibility – your act of trust and worship - is to say what God has given you and react in a Godly manner in the face of *any* reaction, good or bad. Disconcerting? Jesus did it all the time. Are we ready to be that bold? Can you be prophetic in your life generally, or do you just keep it for Sunday? Do you use the gifts that God has given you throughout your week, in all circumstances?

What you'd be doing is worshipping by being open to God's presence – living God's commands, listening to His words and doing what might be called 'the Kingdom thing'. We need to be in a place where we can say: "I want my life to be a song to the Lord, for I was created to worship Him". Living your whole life as a song to the Lord, singing His lordship over your feelings, emotions, decisions, situations, hurts etc. is another way in which you can most effectively worship.

We are God's mouthpiece and representatives – we're his tools! If our attitudes and worship are synchronised with Him, then others will see **less of us and more of God** in us. The centurion with a suffering, paralyzed servant at home in Matthew 8:8 and the Canaanite woman with the demon possessed daughter in Matthew 15:21-28 both *knew* (and had faith) that Jesus was special – without Jesus having to say or do anything. Jesus' relationship with his father was perfect worship and that gave him power and tangible inspiration to others. People glimpsed *God*.

We need to invest in building up our worship: in the morning admire the morning sun and the start of a new day; when there's thunder and lightning, just sit and wonder at the might of what God's made. I have friends who have been reduced to tears at the Grand Canyon; I've stood on the edge of a live volcano and felt the bowels of the earth move as it has heaved and spewed...and marvelled at God's creation; the view of Saturn's rings, Jupiter's moons or the Pleiades through a powerful telescope evoke wonder at God's handiwork. We all have 'those' moments when life just makes us catch our breath: for a surfer it's the perfect wave, for a climber it's a snow or a rock formation, for a naturalist it will be a part of nature, for an engineer it will be an intricate design, for an astronomer it will be a discovery about a new stellar event, for an artist it will be a creation. The list is

endless, but the principle is the same: it's special and we're related to the creator of all this natural beauty. NOTE THAT it's not *just* Christians who experience this, nor is it uncommon for God to use the works/creations of someone who *isn't* a Christian to move us spiritually. God gave *everyone* the ability to create something beautiful because everyone was made in His image and He gave everyone a spirit that needs Him. Have you ever wondered why a 'secular' song, or poem, or painting has spoken to you spiritually? Just because the artists don't realise or acknowledge it's God's gift, doesn't diminish God's ability to use *his* gift He gave them. **We were created by a creative God to create.** If YOU are receptive to God, He can use anything and anyone to speak to you. Those artists have no choice if God chooses to use the gifts he's given them!

This is not just sentimentality; it's an acknowledgement of God's ability and creativity - an attitude that God enjoys because He breathed it into life and gave it to us to look after in the first place. We worship by appreciating God and His creativity and acknowledge we couldn't have done it in a million years, let alone in seven days and in Luke 19:38-40 Jesus says if we don't do it, then the stones will cry out instead.

Biblical Examples of Worshipers

David

Looking through the Bible, we find that, of the many men and women God used, most had their priorities and worship attitudes right with Him. The most obvious example is King David whose worship skills had miraculous results. Most of the Psalms either praise God or speak of relying on Him – indeed the word *tehillim*, as they psalms were called were called, is translated into ‘psalms of praise’. David knew who his God was and praised accordingly - he was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22, 1 Samuel 13:14) and, in many ways, was a template for our worship. Even though the lifestyle which David had was at times debauched, David was man of zeal and integrity and God saw his faith and courage and honoured it. David’s knowledge of God led him to be chosen from his seven brothers by Samuel in order to fulfil God’s purpose for a long time. Even at a young age David was playing his harp to Saul and releasing spirits which were in him, not just because his playing was brilliant, but because David’s attitude of worship to God was appropriate. It wasn’t that David necessarily loved music (although I’m sure he did); he loved *God* – so much so that he wanted to bless Him and do his best for Him...so David played and sang well anyway. He realised the potential that praising God had and God worked through David’s humble heart. David never analysed God’s ability or power at this stage, he just *did* it, admirably demonstrated by his attitude to Goliath’s challenge. As far as David was concerned God was either God of everything or He wasn’t - and if He *was* then there was nothing to worry about. God delighted to honour David for his obedience and his ability to live a life that was mindful and worshipful of Him.

Hezekiah

Hezekiah is introduced to us in 2 Chronicles 29 as a man who followed the example of his ancestor David. He wasted no time in establishing that there was only one true God to be worshipped. He had a grasp of why God had been angry with previous inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem and set out to rectify that. In verse 11 he says “My sons do not lose any time. You are the ones that the Lord has chosen to burn incense to Him and to lead the people in worshipping Him.” Hezekiah was saying that the Levites had a *duty* to serve and minister to God and, this being the case, it is no surprise that he instigated the temple rededication in verses 18-36. What is interesting here is the fact that it was a real party: sacrifices, trumpets and enjoyment are all used, resulting in forgiveness and ritual cleanliness at the end of the worship, suggesting that offering a sacrifice of praise to God (Hebrews 13:15) is a valuable instruction. Once the temple had been rededicated and the people worshipped, happiness appears to have returned, intimating that a life where our praise is not sufficient is a life in need.

Nehemiah

One of the main qualities attributed to Nehemiah was that he was deeply dependent on God and frequently prayed to Him to find out the best course of action. In the first chapter of Nehemiah's book God says (in response to Nehemiah's prayer) that if the Jews turn and do as God commands them, He will bring them back to a place where He has chosen to be worshipped. This in effect meant that if Nehemiah would physically rebuild the walls of Jerusalem as *they* could, God would rebuild the people as *He* could. It was important to Nehemiah (and God) to rebuild the walls physically because Jerusalem was physically weak – the Holy City's protection was largely rubble and God did not want a people who were weak and defenceless. Regularly interspersed with praise and confessions, Nehemiah organised a work schedule for re-establishing God's glory both in people's lives and in the city of Jerusalem. Despite opposition and many hard times, Nehemiah persevered and restored a sense of priority in the Jews' lives, in 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15) whilst showing them how God wanted them to live. He began to command great respect and thus lead the people nearer to a worshipful and harmonious existence with their God. This is how *powerful* the act of worship can be...

(Perhaps we should understand more of what it means to be asking of God, to worship God regularly and show outwardly what sort of perspective worship can give. We *can* live life away from God if we choose but if we integrate God into our daily living, life will be so much fuller, more in tune and aligned with God - and certainly have more of an impact for Him.)

Eli

The prophet who speaks to Eli in 1 Samuel 2:30 and reprimands him for being too soft on his sons and too covetous, declares that God will no longer tolerate his attitudes but “Instead I will honour those who honour me and I will treat with contempt those who despise me”. God speaks plainly to Eli with an ultimatum: either he honours God and obeys Him or Eli suffers the consequences. God is a jealous God and that jealousy concerns other gods (of *any* description) because we were created to worship Him and not become distracted by anything else to His detriment. God does not want anyone to revere materials or dead ‘gods’ because he sees the futility of the exercise and the damage it does to us by separating our focus from Him. Moses is told this in no uncertain terms in Deuteronomy 4:24: “Because the Lord your God is like a flaming fire, He tolerates no rivals”. In Mark 10:17-23, Jesus teaches that obeying the commandments is good but that anything can be an idol – in this case, money. The rich man had to make a choice *concerning his mindset* and we are left to assume that he made the wrong one, supporting the verse in 1 Timothy 6:10 that *the love* of money is the root of all evil.

***Anything* becomes a god when, in our hearts and minds, it takes precedence over *the* God.**

Hezekiah smashed all the remnants of idol worship in Judah (2 Kings 18:4) and Moses broke the first tablets with the ten commandments when he discovered that Aaron had allowed the Israelites to worship the golden calf (Exodus 32:19). Both men found it abhorrent that anyone other than God was being worshipped. The people lost faith in God quickly and tried to use another god for their gain when clearly this was wholly inappropriate. We do not worship God for what we get out of it. Fasting is not a hunger strike with God and worship is not a bribe to get God to do what you want. The reason we worship God is because we revere Him and realise His place in our lives, not because we want a favour. His input into our lives is at His discretion.

Every time we realise that there is a part of us that is not totally open or subject to God and then surrender it to Him, we take a little more ground from Satan and reduce his ability to attack us in those areas. This is walking in the light with God:

anything that is open to God cannot be used against us because it is not secret or hidden in a dark place – Jeremiah 23:24, Psalm 139:7-12. However if we hold on to something and hide it away we open ourselves up to guilt, mind games and condemnation. It's often painful and/or embarrassing to face up to it but if we have a conversation with God about it, however hard, it reduces Satan's ability to connive, deter and distract us from our worshipful relationship with God.

The Disciples

The disciples were an effective tool for Jesus because they were 12 totally different characters trying to learn what Jesus was about and who he really was. Simon Peter only gained an appreciation because God's Holy Spirit showed him Jesus' being (Matthew 16:16, 17) and earlier John the Baptist had been given a special anointing (Luke 1:14-17). The disciples were, in a way, indicative of people right through the ages trying to understand more of what Jesus was doing and trying to comprehend why things happened (e.g. why they couldn't drive out a particularly wild demon Matthew 17:19, 20). Jesus lived a life which was perfect: his ideal, priorities, worship, patience, humility...his whole life was everything that God wanted and in which He delighted.

It is important to realise that all the different characters in the Bible did not have superhuman qualities. They were people with passions and whims as well as character flaws – remember Moses killed someone; Gideon was afraid; Jonah ran away; Mary Magdalene was demon possessed; Noah got drunk; Samson was a hot tempered womaniser. But these were ordinary people who became extraordinary by their submissiveness to the power of God. Sometimes He chose the weak instead of the strong, sometimes He had to break people to get their attention, but He took the failures of all these people, however small, and used them to further His ultimate purpose in each individual situation.

Jesus

So what did Jesus teach us in all this?

The most apparent thing is his humility. On several occasions Jesus said “Not my will but thy will be done”. When Jesus taught people how to pray the Lord’s Prayer he says as part of the prayer “Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. He submitted totally and willingly to God. Jesus lived this submission to its ultimate conclusion in the garden of Gethsemane when he prayed that if it were possible the cup might pass from him – but that he would submit to his father’s wishes. We know this cost him a great deal of pain – and his life. Jesus had a trust and relationship with his father that was able to accept that God *was* God and that there was no need to question the wisdom of his father. Jesus knew that worship and adoration of God was vital even if it was just grace when he was feeding the 4 000 (Matthew 15 32-38) and 5 000 (Luke 9 10-15). He was always very careful to direct all the praise back to his father with no room for doubt, as is evident in his reply to the rich man in Luke 18:19: “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.” We too must recognise that it is God who gives us our strength and gifts and not to make the mistake of becoming proud or self important. It is to God that the glory must be given - and then our perspectives are right and He can move through us.

If we are looking towards a goal of being identical to Jesus – our example – we need to realise that he was in touch with his father and gave Him honour for everything. In Matthew 9:27-31 Jesus orders the two blind men he heals not to tell of their miracles; Jesus did not need to become a hero or to achieve fame (or infamy) – he wanted his father’s honour to shine.

Jesus protected his father’s temple – where worship took place - and he wants us to do the same, whether it be in a building or in our spirits. There are those who see Jesus as weak and timid and have confused the ‘gentle Jesus meek and mild’ with an inability to be strong minded, determined and focussed. This is the man who stormed into the temple, flung over tables, upset money piles and drove crowds out of a market in a large building. This is not a faint-hearted character but an angry, charismatic one who had significant mental strength and stamina and who was jealously guarding a place of his father’s worship - and who is just as

jealous of the place of his father's worship in our hearts. To be able to cope with everything that he did through his life and retain his cutting edge, clarity and authority required wisdom and constant recourse to his father. We often read that people found Jesus alone, or that he disappeared for a while to regain his strength. Jesus understood the need to go back and meet with God quietly, personally, so that he could renew himself in his father.

After he had expelled the money traders and thieves in the temple Jesus began to heal people and in Matthew 21:15 and 16 it is the children who sing "Hosanna to the Son of David" while the chief priests and teachers of the law are the ones who do not understand, and question the children's praise. Jesus recalls Psalm 8:2 to his detractors and counters that children and infants *can* offer praise. It is no coincidence that this is said after Jesus has broken up those who were defiling God's house: he was protecting both the praise to his father and the praise from the children who he used so often in his examples.

John 2:19 then records that Jesus said that if the temple was destroyed he would rebuild it in three days. Misinterpreted by the Jewish authorities at the time to mean the physical temple, Jesus was actually declaring his resurrection and the indestructibility of his spirit and mission after an episode where God had been totally dishonoured. Jesus is saying that man can do what he wills, but that God *will* have praise – and if man won't do it then God's creation will (Luke 19:40). God places huge importance on adoration: "Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts." - Colossians 3:16b.

The Knock On Effect

When we worship, miracles happen. All through the Bible when people have given God His honour and trusted Him to work His ways, they have not been disappointed. In Jericho as Joshua led his people in faith around the city walls in Joshua 6, the instruction was to praise God and proclaim His victory for seven days, which would have been intimidating, embarrassing and physically tiring. This apparently foolish action was honoured by God and Jericho was duly ransacked after seven days with shouting, trumpets and declarations of God's omnipotence and invincibility. All it need for the miracle was obedience; it was the actions, faith and worship that were important.

Throughout the Bible, God sends the musicians and worshippers into battle first signifying that the proclamation of God's might is far more important than numerical or military superiority. Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20 sent his worshippers/singers into battle first, whereupon the joint might of three armies imploded. God showed through Gideon's 300 men, whittled down from a tactically sensible 32 000 (Judges 7) that He wins battles on His terms and it's the acknowledgement and worship of Him that is sacrosanct. This will also be how God will finally defeat Satan and how God's people will see him banished, declaring God as king. Through our worship we have authority to take total control and push Satan's kingdom back; however it is vital that we realise that Satan *is* powerful and that *God* is our strength and our armour. Our praise is part of our weaponry and the key holder to our weapons cabinet is, and should be, God - and God alone. If there is one thing Satan hates it is a declaration of God's victory and power - because it's true. He knows better than anyone what Jesus did at the cross and how it hurt him and he does his best to blind Christians to the power that this gives them. Talk to anyone who has been involved in the occult their greatest adverse reaction is to the praise of God. From this it is obvious that if there is one thing that can upset Satan and his angels it is God's praise, which in turn can produce results: God is glorified, we are edified and Satan's works are destroyed.

Satan was so keen to offer Jesus all the kingdoms he could see in return for Jesus bowing to him (Matthew 4:8-10) because he understood the power of worship. If Satan could distract Jesus through greed and get him to bow down it would diminish Jesus and cause him to sin. If we give God the glory and don't 'bow' to our 'devils', our perspective becomes clearer, our understanding of Him grows and our relationship with him deepens. As this happens we learn more, which in

turn allows us to give God more glory... It is a spiral we should aspire to ascend as the more we immerse ourselves in that process, the less chance Satan has of corrupting any Godly thoughts. Of course he will always discourage, destroy, deceive etc. in order to stop us but when our praise is offered it is metaphorically akin to nails on a blackboard to Satan and we cannot help but be encouraged. Offering a sacrifice of praise is the key – putting aside how we feel and praising anyway because God just *is* and considering God in all aspects of our life, seven days a week. We can use our daily worship of God to affect people and atmospheres, purely *because* we have a worshipful relationship with Him. If our prayer is that we become less visible, even transparent, and God becomes more visible - then just by being God's vessel can have an impact on our surroundings. We don't have to suddenly be afflicted by a bout of super spirituality or rush into biblical texts and 'John 3:16's; we can just have a worshipful, Godly attitude to our presence that pervades our persona, through which God can work.

There is an old song called 'All Hail The Lamb' that says "Our praise shall be our battle cry". This isn't just a song, it is a promise given by God stating we will win battles by proclaiming God's praise. We can shift spiritual forces by our worship and proclamation of God's sovereignty because we are in effect declaring the rightful ownership of all situations. In Moses' battle with the Amalekites (Exodus 17), while his hands were lifted to God the Israelites were winning but when his hands dropped, the Amalekites began to win. The requirement was for Moses not only to pray but also to praise God in faith for the victory and God's faithfulness to His promises. It was to believe that God would honour Moses' perseverance and trust over the entire day of battle that he had to have his hands up. The lesson for us is that we need to be tenacious when things seem futile, when all we have to rely on is God's promise. When we worship we declare that God is in control, extolling Him and thereby affecting spiritual spheres because God moves through our honouring Him. Praise is truly a battle cry more than we might understand and our worship needs to be integral and active, thus becoming powerful and relevant.

Five Consequences of Truly Worshipping God

As we honour God, we can only benefit. There are statutory benefits that accompany worshipping God (not that we consciously or selfishly evaluate what we can get in return). God will give back to us whenever we do His will because we cannot help but gain from putting God in His rightful place throughout our lives. By doing this we are proclaiming to all the spiritual powers that God is in total control and re-submitting ourselves to His authority. Through this God can move and breathe on our situations as our attitudes and perceptions are right with His; additionally, He can teach us more of how to live His way, increasing our understanding of Him. God loves seeing one of His children being blessed as they learn to see things through His perspective...similar to a parent teaching a child a skill or a process and seeing them adapt and use it appropriately. The basic learning process has been completed and it is the practice and adaptation of the groundwork that brings results...here are five of them:

1) We are attributing to God the very things He wants and we are living out the reason He created us. God wants a being in His image, the epitome of perfection to give Him the worship He deserves and, as we praise Him, *we fulfil our role in Him*. As we remain mindful of His ways and declare His lordship, *we please* God.

2) We allow God room to manoeuvre in our time. God will not often force His way into our schedules – we need to make time for Him – but if we acknowledge God in all things He can let loose prophecies, words of knowledge and other spiritual gifts, and not necessarily when *we* expect it and not necessarily *just* with other Christians. Are you ready for that? In John 4:1-26 and 39-42, Jesus only told the woman at the well about her husband and her current partner (not husband) but *she* said he had told her *everything*. A simple word of knowledge was magnified by Jesus' spirit – and it went back and re-shaped the woman's village. We need to have faith to believe that what we say (and do) is greater than the sum of their parts. God has the megaphone; don't belittle it!

It is perhaps ironic that God blesses and speaks to us so that we benefit but so often we 'don't have the time' to receive that. God is not bound by time, but we *are* and part of our attitude of worship is to cost ourselves time with God...it's worth the blessing that God aches to distribute but asks us to permit.

3) If our idea of God's sovereignty over everything is established, we will not feel nearly so desolate if the sky is apparently falling on our heads. It is natural to be

concerned with how we become ‘better’, or pay the next bill or lose our illness or sort out that relationship etc., but we should make it more important to understand that God is in control and that He is worthy of our praise in all situations. If we learn how to do this, not only will we be able to effectively share our load with Him, but we will truly understand that there are *no* unsolvable problems, even if it seems that way. Living our lives for God means being able to do what Job did when God allowed Satan to test him – and look how God rewarded Job!

4) As we give God the rightful place in our lives we mature. The higher the place we give God, the more we begin to see His sense and plan for things. We learn that trusting Him is not a futile pastime and that the pace He has set for us is the pace at which we best function at that point in our lives. As we grow in our human family we gradually realise that most of the things our parents said have some semblance of sense to them and that “Because I said so” is actually a perfectly good reason that *doesn't* need explaining. We understand that there is method to our parents’ apparent madness we endured in our youth and that we will do the same for our children. So it is with God: sometimes God says “Because I said so.” He has a perfect reason for everything and it is our responsibility to remember this and praise Him that He is working all things out for our good (Romans 8:28). The more we appreciate this, the more we mature in God as we allow Him to receive our worship and to ably work out our issues.

5) We get a little closer to God...if He blesses us every time we bless Him and we grow because of our meetings with Him, then it must follow that we become closer to God every time. We nurture our relationships with people by talking with them, arguing, spending time together and generally learning more of one another. This follows with any relationship we have with God – we must take time to get to know Him better and respect the times we have together with Him. In a way it is one of the easiest relationships to nurture because He’s always there and is the perfect example of love and patience, but conversely His omnipresence is easy to take for granted and we can forget that He is always with us. This can be an interesting phenomenon that is hard to grasp: absolutely everything you say, do, think, feel, every wish you entertain, everywhere you go is shared by God. That makes Him a pretty close friend, let alone father – and it also means we can’t hide from Him, which gives both tremendous freedom and security. The Psalmist knew this in Psalm 139 – there is nothing you can conceal from God and there is no point in even considering hiding something from God’s view because He knew

it before you were formed. He loves you anyway. He can cope with anything and it means that the basis for your relationship with God can be, if you allow it to be, complete honesty and openness.

These are just five thoughts concerning the many benefits to worshipping God - but they should not be our focus. Worship God just *because* He is God, not for any gain, and rest secure in the knowledge that all this and more will be freely given by Our Father.

When In Church...

There Is *No* Rule Book

The very nature of worship dictates that it is an individual activity, but worshipping within the context of a group is different to doing it alone. If a group is worshipping God He can move in a different way than if we are in the privacy of our own hearts because the situation is different. Both are important in different ways because one encourages personally and is more individual-orientated, whereas the other is corporate praise blessing both God and one another; both involve growth. When people are healed, or there are words of knowledge or prophecies are given the group can benefit. However, individually the worshipper can also feel encouraged, peaceful, or can receive revelations concerning either them personally or to do with others.

In Daniel 6:10 Daniel knew the importance of personal worship to the extent that he was willing to disobey Darius' decree that no one but the king should be worshipped – on pain of death. The king had Daniel thrown into the lion pit but God upheld Daniel's faithfulness and placated the lions, proving to Darius that God truly was Lord of all things. Jesus needed time alone to allow God to minister to him while he was human and most of the psalms were written as a positive or negative personal response to God. Conversely, Hezekiah instigated a time of national repentance for sins and Moses and the Israelites all sang God's praises after Pharaoh's men had been lost in the Red Sea. In fact God delivered the Egyptians from Egypt for a festival, a party – halal (or halel) – which means 'to be clear, to shine, to boast, show, to rave, celebrate, to be clamorously foolish.' Individual worship can affect attitudes, realise God's potential for a life and live life as a song for Him – but worshipping together can lift people, allow people to receive ministry or receive from God through another individual. A public miracle blesses everyone; a private one blesses the individual.

We have a triune God and are created with a triune body – body, soul, spirit; we should use this to worship with all three, including movements, action and attitudes. All forms of worship are entirely discretionary...dancing, speaking in tongues, raising hands, silence, stillness, laughing, lying prone, meditation...all are forms of a personal expression of worship to God amongst other Christians. The point is that none of these is wrong. Some may seem a little strange to others, but all are acceptable to God. It is the reverence and fear which God acknowledges and He understands every person individually because He sees their perspective and heart on that occasion. If you don't feel like dancing...don't! (Unless you know that your attitude is wrong) If you are a dancer, find out why you don't

want to dance – there may be a perfectly good reason. You will know if you are not giving God all he deserves and a conscious personal choice is then required. However if you’ve got two left feet and have never danced, don’t measure your worship by someone else’s actions. A quiet attitude of praise is just as valuable as a noisy demonstrative act of worship. God sees your heart and not your actions in the same way he saw the widow’s heart in Luke 21:3. If your heart is so heavy that worship is almost impossible, God accepts that too and it might be that you just have to understand that God is Lord of everything. Praising can help you forget and God honours the sacrifice of personal feelings in order to praise Him; however God is a loving God and meets you where you are. Matthew 11:28-30 was not directed at one specific group of ‘heavy laden’, it was all encompassing - including you in your present situation.

Zephaniah 3:17 says “The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing”.

The Hebrew word used here to describe how God sings is ‘*rinnab*’ and it means to express a ringing cry, a loud shout, a proclamation of extreme joy and an expression of gladness. God exults over us with joy and rejoices over us with singing. *This* ‘rejoice’ translates as ‘spinning around under the influence of violent emotion’. God rejoices over us! The creator and ruler of the universe, the One Who is all-powerful, perfect and completely holy – that same God rejoices over *us*! We self-righteous, mistake laden, full of messes and sins are the ones that God rejoices over with joy. The word used for ‘rejoice’ is from a root meaning “to circle around” and is applied in the Old Testament to host of circumstances that convey joyous human occasions such as a wedding, the satisfaction of a proud father, deliverance from enemies or a beautiful bride.

This is why we were called to be fools for Christ: because He is a fool for us! We have essentially been given in marriage to God and He’s going berserk over us, so we should we mirror it and reaffirm the marriage covenant in shameless praise. We should be fools because we are so ridiculously in love with Him that we don’t care how we look – but also because, with God so excited and in love with us, *nothing* is impossible or insurmountable.

When I first met my (now) wife, my heart skipped, I couldn’t eat and every moment was spent thinking about her and wondering when we would next speak

or see each other. I wanted to be with her every moment of every day. Imagine translating that excitement of love to your Christian life.

Ps 100:4 demands ‘enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.’ There are actually seven Hebrew Words for praise and all demand action – they are a description of what you’re *doing*:

‘Halal’ is the highest form of praise and should conjure up images of out of control, unrestrained, unimpeded, shameless, go-nutty-for-God(!) adoration in whatever guise;

‘tehillah’ is derived from the word ‘halal’ and means ‘the singing of halals’ and is accepted to involve music, especially singing and hymns of the Spirit;

‘shabach’ means ‘to shout, command or triumph’;

‘barak’ means kneeling down and blessing God as an act of adoration.

‘zamar’ means ‘to pluck the strings of an instrument, to sing, to praise. It is a musical word which is largely involved with joyful expressions of music with musical instruments’;

‘yadah’ and ‘towdah’ concern worshipping with extended hand(s). This includes clapping – however “Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with the voice of triumph” (Psalm 47:1) means so much more than a basic clapping along to a tune or keeping a rhythm.

There are four Hebrew words meaning ‘clap’, two of which imply giving praise and exaltation. ‘Taq’ is ‘to slap the hands together’ and ‘macha’ is ‘to strike the hands together in exaltation’ and is used in Psalm 98:8 (Let the floods clap their hands) and Isaiah 55:12 (The trees of the fields shall clap their hands)

However the other two words are Eastern in custom. ‘Saphaq’ is used as an indication of derision and scorn, as in Lamentations 2:15 (...all who pass your way clap their hands at you...) and Job 27:23 (...it [the east wind] claps its hands in derision and hisses him out of his place).

The other word, ‘nakah’ means striking or going forward, or punishing. 2 Kings 11:12: “Jehoiada brought out the king’s son and put the crown on him; he presented him with a copy of the covenant and proclaimed him king. They anointed him, and the people clapped their hands and shouted, “Long live the king!” This wasn’t a round of applause, this was praising God, inviting His presence and an expression of worship and praise. As the people clapped and worship at one level, God’s presence was being invoked.

Next time you clap in church, will it be with a different understanding and spirit?

So, to return to Ps 100:4: it is an encouragement to enter the Holy of Holies with worship and this is how we encounter God, regardless of how we feel. If you don't feel like worshipping, go back to the Bible or to basics – thank God for your (e.g.) health or sight or read Psalm 139. Look for and (choose to) see God who makes mountains seem like a speck of dust. If we do that there will be a natural flow:

FLOW

Thanksgiving is a response to
His works which leads to

Praise, which is a response to His nature
(roll out the red carpet to...)

Worship, which is a response
to His presence



Practicalities for Musicians and Leaders

**(but has lots of relevance to everyone –
so read on!)**

It's important to acknowledge that this section includes the sound team - and indeed anyone responsible for projecting words etc. - who are integral to our worship: they turn instrumentals up, turn the whole thing down, recognize harmonies and bring them up, change words/backgrounds smoothly and sensitively – they worship by using their skills to support the team as God moves.

We should actively seek God during the week, actively *expect* God to talk to us and prod us so that we not only develop ourselves spiritually but so that we can bring what we have on a Sunday to *lead* worship. God works with our characters: if you are a leader who is a last minute person, God will work with that; if you are a planner or a thinker, God will use that facet of your character to tell help you plan how He wants things done and said. Don't try to change or be 'different' – God made you for a reason and will use you as you!

Even in the weeks you're not on duty, God has you in a team whose *responsibility* is to model worship. You should be *actively* looking for words, pictures, verses, prophecies, *anything* that God can use, not only at a meeting but in your daily life. Don't be afraid to 'lead from the back' – you are still part of the worship team with that responsibility, whether you are 'just' in the congregation, mixing the music or playing/singing. And don't be afraid of the bizarre...if your heart is after God's he will use you and you just have to trust that He won't let you down. The oddest word I've ever heard that a person had for someone else is 'nice shoes'...and it was apparently right!

You should ensure that your mindset isn't a passive 'turning up on a Sunday and seeing what happens' but an active '*What's God got and how am I a part of that?* WE are God's instruments ('scuse the pun!) for leading others to worship Him. Develop all those harmonies and skills and actively listen for prophetic words or songs or verses from the Bible that are from God and weave them into the instrumental bits. If we do our bit, we can then expect great things from Him!

You see your team is not just a music team, it's a worship leading team with the skills to play and sing. That's an important distinction because, whilst we try to be as excellent as we can in our abilities, that is *not* the be all and end all. **The important thing is that God takes our efforts, sees our hearts and works through them to make sometimes very ordinary offerings become very special.** Our focus is not purely technical ability, skill or acoustics, our focus is

on God. I would rather have a reasonably skilled musical worshipper in my team than a technically excellent musician who isn't a worshipper. Every time, no question.

Our responsibility is to help create a worshipful atmosphere by hearing from God during the week, planning a time of musical worship and leading the church, in the way we feel God is leading each week. Sometimes He changes the direction and sometimes it doesn't go to plan, but that's fine. If you do need to tackle a service that (you think) isn't going well, try stopping and have a time of prayer; think about changing direction; call others to pray; consider altering your original plan totally(!) All of us have a duty to learn to be sensitive to God and speak up with words, wisdom, spiritual challenges (including dropping songs etc.) *wherever* we are in church. Spirit led isn't always comfortable but it *is* always of God...

...be open to different events happening – be open to things being uncomfortable and keep your spiritual antennae alert. The right song at the right time is prophetic – jump on, hang on and enjoy the ride! If you have the idea, put it out there. Switch it on, let others grasp it. There are no limits – if God gives you an idea, run with it because it will be prophetic, spirit filled, spirit led worship.

Oh, and we need to be confident in putting our instruments down occasionally. Our *worship* is the important thing.

I've said that our responsibility is to lead others in worship. Technically that is true, but we are not responsible *for* others' worship. We come with a plan and an attitude but how anyone reacts to that is between them and God. Once we begin to lead others, the most important thing is for us to worship. I saw Leonard Jones in concert locally and he literally said words to the effect of 'these are my songs, you won't know some of them but that's unimportant. I'm doing this concert but it's really my worship of God and I'm going to worship Him whether you join in or not. Hope you enjoy the concert!' There may be a lesson there for those of us who worry about how any audience/congregation might react to our leading worship!

There have been occasions where just one slow drum beat, or just one chord have rung out unaccompanied in a service and that has electrified the worship. It has been God, breathing on a very simple part of music, but working through the individual's worship – it has been the right thing at the right time.

In 1 Chronicles 25 David commanded the Levites to prophesy with their instruments because the creative power of God rests in music. The Holy Spirit not only inspires music and releases anointing but, in 2 Kings 3:15, He uses music for the glory of God and for the edification of people. Wouldn't it be fantastic if our communities changed because our music caused an intimate exchange and encounter with the King of Kings?! An instrument that is used with an attitude of worship is not just an instrument making a noise – it's a weapon in God's arsenal, being wielded by the musician.

My personal prayer is:

'Let me be Your instrument, let me be the joy of Your voice. Give me the sounds and words to evoke Your presence, Your power and Your spirit through music, through creativity. Let miracles flow through my imperfect talents. Let me make a cacophony in Hell but a melody in Heaven!'

We need to understand a song and react to the words as necessary. Too often we just sing songs without thinking too hard about them and as such we are only going through the motions. If you'd written a song for a loved one or in memory of a close friend, you would concentrate on the meanings and nuances behind each sentence and this is how we should react to songs of God's worship. Particularly as worship leaders, the words we sing have a direct effect on those singing them and planning the songs with wisdom and an understanding of what they say can sometimes be the difference between the congregation just having a good time and God meeting with the church. We have to appreciate this in parallel with the music we play. There is a fine line between manipulation and accompaniment and as musicians we have to be aware of our ability to just 'perform' rather than lead worship. Our spirit and motivation need to be focussed *solely* on God and not on good music, good feelings or altar calls **for their own sake**. We need to get to a place where our worship reflects a deep, meaningful and soulful love for God – where God can move in power. A couple of notes or chords can be personal and intimate and where God moves. Remember David started off with a real 'back country' relationship with God - a reliant, real, from-the-heart love, which is why his worship was so effective when dealing with healing, demons and more.

In that vein: music moves people. It moves people in different ways and for different reasons. The *volume* (dB – decibels) of music *alone* can affect us - scientists have found that loud music makes alcohol taste sweeter but also that high-amplitude audio signals affect a tiny organ in the inner ear called the sacculus which is linked to a region of the brain associated with the response to pleasure. It reacts to low-frequency vibrations over 90dB (the approximate volume of a wedding/dance band) and raising the volume of music elevates the intensity of the musical experience. Listeners undergo significant, measurable changes in mind-body states and, scientists say, loud music is simply a stronger stimulant than soft music.

Now think about the raves (possibly 110+ dB), Christian worship concerts (maybe 100 dB), bands (up to 115 dB) and Christian song writers' shows that you've been to where the whole crowd is in a state of mass worship. Think about where your worship team is headed or where it leads you. Is it acceptable to use this knowledge to excite the audience? Does the worship become contrived if we use 'tricks' to inspire people? **Where is your focus?** Using your musical ability to

solo, or play virtuoso stuff, or even divert to an impromptu jam session might be prophetic – God can certainly use it. If you end up on a tangent to where you started, relax and let it flow – it might just be that God is doing something amazing. As long as it's not intended to be manipulative, anything goes!

Music moves musicians. They play music, they respond to music, music can elate them, depress them, irritate them, inspire them...and more. They have an understanding – or at least an awareness - of music: how it should go together, whether there are wrong notes, timings and voices, cadences and keys. From this, worship can be led by them (or indeed spoiled for them) as God-given appreciation for music drives them to an emotional and spiritual response, both in a church arena but also *outside* of it; *all* music can be spiritual.

Music also moves non-musicians – they may not know why it moves them, but they will feel the same emotions to 'their' type of music, whether it is Christian or not. Music is a gift from God and if you play it, God can move through your creativity prophetically, whether it has words or not. You become God's vehicle. God gives us our creativity! If we are in touch with Him and can use that creativity to be a vehicle for him, people won't be able to avoid being touched. We need a new perspective and influence that comes from our relationship with Christ, prophetically moving in His gifts through us.

Worship is a response but we need to be aware of what is it we're responding to. God? The music? The atmosphere? Feeling good? Musical excellence? Thundering bass tones? Responding to 'feel' might seem satisfying but is ultimately empty as it will never be perfect. What happens when the 'feel' goes? The thing we *actually* worship is not there so the worship diminishes if it's not replicated. If our focus is God, then the same song on a tinny stereo, or played by poorer musicians will elicit our worship. Worship leaders need to be aware of all these factors and ensure that their direction is to become (and help lead others to become) intimate lovers of the Most High God.

It's possible to go away from a meeting having played (in your own opinion) badly and feeling quite dejected. (This might be *despite* being assured by others that they were blessed by your playing) Pride takes a terrible tumble when all you want to be is good – but you're *supposed* to be being Godly. 'Duff' notes, bad timing, wondering if anyone noticed that missed B and very proud A^b on more than a

couple of occasions and wondering what they think of you as a musician is *not* Godly (although it might be understandably human).

The answer is to find our strength in God and have an attitude of worship. That way, if someone praises a member of your team but not you, you don't become focussed on whether they thought of you less favourably – or indeed react in the face of constructive, or even destructively negative, feedback. Our heart needs to be fixed on Psalm 150, not on how we performed. We each have a job to do which is far beyond our egos and even our capabilities: David's playing in 1 Samuel 16 was God inspired and God breathed.

Oh, and it's OK to be proud of what you play/sing. It's OK to be excited that you played/sang skilfully. God gave you that talent and if you've spent time investing in it, honing it, practicing it (or indeed you are one of those irritating people who are just good without needing to practice!), you are allowed a sense of pride in your skill. You are allowed to be glad that you're talented. You've blessed God with it, and if you don't use it for fear of being proud, you're effectively hiding your light under the bushel. Just stay humble, thank God continuously for the talent he's given you and enjoy the ride! *Don't* fall into the trap of false humility (“Was I really that good”... “Oh no it was nothing”... “No I was terrible”...). “Thank you” is a perfectly acceptable response to appropriate praise.

Ultimately it's NOT about the talent, it's about the spirit.

David loved being in God's presence musically and we should love that also, regardless of whether we get encouraged or not. If we become discouraged from *lack* of encouragement, we're relying on others, not God. Our strength is in the worshipping of God and our humility and focus on Him.

This releases us – prophetic singing, instrumentals, knowing where to take a song, to go where God wants – so He can do through us in our church what He did to Saul through David. Look for God – maybe it is first thing that comes into your head; continuously tune your spiritual ear so that He can move.

As an aside - and practical point: if you have a bible verse or (short!) reading, don't be afraid to read it multiple times, especially to music. The repetition will allow people to actually hear and concentrate on different elements each time it's read.

Read it slowly and authoritatively – don't be embarrassed or apologetic for the repetition. Try emphasising it differently each time.

Once a friend, who is reputed to be about as musical as a brick, unwittingly presented me with a challenge. Truth be known he is probably marginally better than that, but he himself acknowledges that music in and of itself just doesn't move him. He doesn't recognise 'good' or 'bad' musicians, doesn't notice ear splittingly awful flat singing, hideous accompaniments or solo instrumentals and has no idea which instruments sound good together or which musicians play well together. He *does* have a preference for one worship leader over another, but purely on the basis of someone leading well, or communicating in 'his' way. Yet shouldn't he be moved by the same spirit that cast demons out of Saul?

Interestingly, this friend *does* get moved by the words of worship songs. They could probably be to the tune of 'Ten Green Bottles' but the words *are* significant.

So where does that leave music and musicians?

It could be that the music *does* have an effect on him that he doesn't realise; but that *when* he is being affected by it, his awareness of the words being sung/displayed is heightened. Why *should* he particularly appreciate the way we play?!

Surely lots of people are like this friend – and we have been too preoccupied with being skilful/good to understand that *to them* our ability (or otherwise) could not be less important. It is the spirit within which they are led to worship that is important. In other words, it *is* important to be as excellent as possible at what you do/play to honour God, but that that *in and of itself* is not important. God will work on *your* spirit and attitude so that everyone can benefit from your leading/playing. *How* that relates to any other individual's worshipful response is not your concern!

This can be seen positively in a couple of ways:

- 1) If *you* think the worship is rubbish and you feel like you're playing with dustbin lids on your hands/screeching like an alley cat, there are people out there who will never know!

- 2) Your intrinsic talent is not overly important to God – it is your heart and your attitude (1 Samuel 16:7) that He will use. Yes, the better you are the better the sound but if God has chosen *you* to be His worship vehicle at any given point in time, that's precisely who he wants, at *your* level, with *your* skill. Not Vivaldi, not Satriani, not Lloyd Webber but YOU. And it's precisely *because* that's what He wants that He will take you, where you are, and fill any gaps there are.

- 3) There will always be someone better than you and there will always be someone worse than you. There will at some point be a guest or a visitor who has played music professionally/to huge auditoriums/as a teacher or who has led thousands in worship/led internationally/written the book. This person will be present at a meeting YOU are leading and your first reaction will be one of feeling threatened/insecure/judged. The point is this: it is a human reaction and GOD DOES NOT CARE. And if *He* doesn't, neither should you! Your responsibility before God is to play and lead worship, and it is YOU and *not* said visitor who God has chosen to use today.

Your style, *your* sensitivity, *your* awareness of God - and His presence at that meeting - is what He has planned today and nothing else matters...

...that said, we should strive to be as excellent as we can be as part of our personal worship of God. Yes, God *could* play supernaturally for us, but He's far more likely to use our talent. Musicians who would offer praises on their instruments must seek to excel in doing so. This *may* be a spiritual skill, rather than natural talent, *but* the skill is not only in playing the instrument, but in discerning and expressing the flow and feeling of the Spirit.

How I would *love* to be in a situation where a cloud descends and disrupts normal church proceedings (2 Chronicles 5: 11-14) because of the musicians' worship!

Where To From Here...?

¹ Praise the Lord.
praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.
² Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.
³ Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,
⁴ praise him with timbrel and dancing,
praise him with the strings and pipe,
⁵ praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.
⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord.

(Psalm 150)

We should strive to become ‘experts’ at worship – in other words we should strive to develop it; push its boundaries; explore it; be brave enough to step out in it and become disorientated.

Worship is a continuous personal journey that should evolve as we live and walk with God every day. It is a journey involving choice, awareness and an understanding that if we make mistakes God is not going to harangue us. What is important is that we want to learn more about God and His ways and then put what we have learned into practice. Experimentation is allowed and even encouraged because God loves to teach us and meet us as we try to honour Him. As we take steps to realise our worshipping potential in God, He will meet us at more than half way and give us the gifts He loves to give as long as our attitudes are correct before Him. We *all* have a lot to learn but God doesn’t mind that – he understands our personalities, our viewpoints, our histories and our progress. It can be hard to even *want* to put in the effort but God is the alpha and omega and holds our worship to Him in the highest esteem. Peter in 1 Peter 4:11 directed the Christians across northern Asia Minor that “Whoever preaches must preach God’s messages; whoever serves must serve with the strength that God gives him, so that **in all things** praise may be given to God through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and power for ever and ever.”

Amen.