

WORSHIP LEADING

The whole issue of worship and worship leading is very much to the fore in the church these days and there is a proliferation of material on the subject - looked at from many different points of view. Whether one agrees with all that is said, God is certainly restoring to the church a new creativity that had been lost for some time, and it is good to see that many people are seeking for truth from the Holy Spirit on this most important subject.

The aim of worship

I suppose I have one very simple aim as I lead worship, and this simple aim encapsulates everything I am going to say in this article. It is so simple that one would think it is almost too obvious, but it is interesting to me that this doesn't seem to be the aim of many who lead worship in the church today. The aim is to come & meet with God .

This meeting with God involves a two way communication. We speak to/minister to God and our desire is that He would in return speak to/minister to us (See Zephaniah 3 vss 14-17 - especially verse 17 for God's response to our worship). It is a sharing with each other the issues that are on our hearts, as well as a desire to bless each other. It is fundamental to the Christian faith that we are born into a relationship with God, and if what we do is not within that relationship, we run into the danger of purely going through a ritual - whether it be a "high church," "evangelical" or "charismatic" ritual. Anything we do apart from God becomes very dry and formalised.

It is my belief that this kind of worship, springing from relationship, is something that the enemy will do his best to hinder or destroy. You see, he knows the importance of worship, and also the positive effect it can have on our relationship with God. He knows it has power to bring down strongholds (because truth proclaimed by God's people counters the lies and half-truths that are whispered in our ears and even taught at times in our churches!). He knows, too, that worship raises our faith and that we are refreshed and strengthened as we come to meet with God (Acts 9:31).

So with those thoughts in mind, I'd like to look initially at some popular misconceptions to do with worship leading:

Worship leading is not:

1. *Leading songs & choruses* (i.e. not just singing). So often in our churches we put aside a few minutes within our services to "sing choruses" (often "so that we can please the young people"). The attitude here is that as long as we use some of the modern songs in our services we are "into renewal" and everything is OK! The problem is that we often treat singing of choruses in exactly the same way as we treat the recitation of a creed or even the singing of a hymn. It has its slot in the service and can often mean nothing at all to anyone involved (or even to God, which is far more important!)

2. *Exhorting others to sing songs.* Have you ever been in church bleary-eyed on a Sunday morning and the worship leader has started a song only to stop after the first verse to say "that's not good enough, you need to sing louder!" (or words to that effect)! To whip up or cajole others into singing songs is not worship leading at all. It is also not mini sermons between songs (being a preacher before the preacher). We, in Wellspring, generally don't find it helpful to spend a minute talking about the previous song then another minute talking about the next song. I'm not saying that we can't introduce at all, but it is very hard to have a flow to worship if there are too many interruptions.

3. *Worshipping while others watch.* It may help if I use the analogy of a meal. If I invited a group of people round to my house for a meal one day, got them all sitting down, and then proceeded to serve myself alone while everyone else looked on, that would hardly be a gracious or acceptable way to act. If I lead worship with no regard for anyone else who is there I cannot be called a worship leader. To develop the theme a little further - it is also not like giving a concert where I am the centre of attention and lots of appreciation and praise is heaped onto me, the music and the composer. My desire should be to deflect the people's gaze from myself and onto the Lord.

4. *Leading while others worship.* This is the opposite of the previous point. I'm sure many people find it difficult to worship whilst leading the worship. We're often concerned about the practicalities involved in leading worship: What we should be singing next, how to play a C# major chord etc. It is very easy to fall into this trap as a worship leader. We must constantly remind ourselves to worship during any worship time that we are leading - otherwise we will find it that much harder to lead others in worship.

5. *A warm-up for the sermon.* In other words our role is not to artificially "set a mood" or "create an atmosphere" into which the preacher can speak (although at times the Holy Spirit does do this as we worship). Here we need to be very careful. Music is a very powerful medium which can deeply touch our emotions. We need to be constantly prayerful that we don't manipulate people artificially.

Worship leading is:

I believe it is worshipping whilst drawing others into worship - we all have the same focus and we are sharing together (partaking of the meal together)

A life of worship

I'd now like to look at the qualities God desires in a worship leader:

1. As I've already said, a worship leader is someone who worships during worship time - (see Ps.34:3)

2. A worship leader is someone who worships at all other times - (Heb.13:15) (Ps 34:1). What I'm saying here is that leading worship can't replace times of personal worship & devotion. The worship leader needs to carry his relationship with the Lord right through the day. It is terribly easy to be so caught up in what God is doing through your worship leading that you rely totally on this as your only source of contact with the Lord. Someone once said very wisely: "don't sacrifice your relationship with God for a musical ministry". One other very important point here. I believe there is a great danger in the church today that we are beginning to worship worship rather than worship the Lord. What do I mean? I've noticed that many Christians are beginning to worship a musical style (e.g. west coast Californian rock music or Taizé songs or hymns with a choir and organ) rather than worshipping God himself. Sometimes we are so moved by a particular style of music that we mistake it for God Himself. I remember one person saying to me once "God is really in that keyboard"!

Terry Virgo tells the story of a woman who went to Africa and spent some time with the black Christian people in a particular township. Towards the end of her stay they all began to sing spontaneously in a beautiful harmony (as the Africans often do). The woman was very moved and found a few tears falling down her cheeks. She turned to her friend and said "that was so beautiful, what were they singing? Her friend turned to her and said "they were singing *if you boil the water, you won't get dysentery*"! It is easy to be deceived! Another related danger is that some people are beginning to worship *worship leaders* - we must not put any of God's servants on a pedestal!

3. A worship leader is someone who leads as directed by Holy Spirit (who is, in fact, the true worship leader!). There is great fear in the leadership of many churches today of being open to the Holy Spirit's leading just in case anything happens which we couldn't foresee or control. There should be no fear - God is for order (see 1 Cor. 14). An article was given to me once which makes this important point in a very amusing way:

THE STAR OF THE SHOW - WAITING IN THE WINGS - by Tim Lenton

My eyes closed and I had a vision. And behold I saw an empty stage, and nothing happened upon the stage, because there was no life there. And I looked, and behold, I saw God enter, stage right; and I knew it was a dream, because no man has seen God and lived, except in a dream. And God stood on the stage, and I knew He had come to a meeting.

Soon there was much shuffling of feet stage left, and a great crowd stood upon the stage - a multitude almost more than man could number. About 150 of them. And they all approached God and stood opposite Him.

A great noise arose from the people, and behold, it was a hymn. They sang praises to God and worshipped Him, and He smiled upon His people. He opened his mouth to speak, but behold the people had stopped singing and were sitting down; even as He smiled on them, they opened their books, and one of their number read to them. And God was happy, because it was His book, and His words.

When they had finished reading God opened His mouth to bless the people, but before He could do so they all with one voice began to pray to Him. And the man who led them was eloquent, and spoke words of sincerity and truth for some time. And God could not get a word in edgeways. But God was pleased with the prayers, because He loved His people. He was about to respond when He noticed that His people had begun singing again.

Then a man came to centre stage, so that he almost touched God, and spoke to the people. And the people gazed upon him and received his words. And his words were faithful and true. God blessed the words that were spoken, and opened His mouth to add a brief sentence; but behold the people were singing again.

And in all this, the people did not seem to see God, although they believed He was there. They did not hear God, because they did not receive His voice. God smiled upon His children again and opened His arms to them. But when He looked, behold, they had turned and gone, because it was time for lunch. And God was alone again upon the stage.

*And God wept, because this play had run longer than *The Mousetrap*, and still He did not seem to have a speaking role.*

It may be refreshing to some to know that we can make mistakes! How else are we going to learn and to grow?

4. A worship leader is someone who desires to serve: worship leading is not a personal image-booster. (Mark 9:35; Phil 2: 3-5). A worship leader will desire to serve: a) God: committed to doing God's will & obeying Him. b)The people: sensitive to their needs & having a shepherd's heart (see John 10:11) - his role is to lead the flock to new pastures & to help them to drink - i.e. helping people to draw near to God and to help them to respond to what God is saying to them. To this end he will take care about the choice & type of songs so as not to offend unduly (e.g. using loud and exuberant songs of praise to a congregation of over 60's may be inappropriate!). It is rather like getting a piece of string to go where you want it to go. If you push it, it just curls up in front of you. If you take it from the end (i.e. where it already is) and gently lead it where you want it to go, it will follow.

5. The worship leader is someone who is recognised as being appointed by God for the task - not necessarily the best musician. So often church leaders have made the mistake of putting the best musician at the front to lead the worship. It may well be that he is not at all gifted in leading others in worship, even though he can play his instrument well. Having said that, the ability to play well can help - see 1 Chron.15:22, Ps. 33:3.

6. The worship leader is someone who desires that worship is evolving. In other words he is not building monuments to any particular experiences that he or the church has had in the past. I know of some churches who experienced a move of God 30 years ago. Today they are still singing the same songs and doing the same things, and they wonder why their congregations are dwindling! God always wants to lead us on to new things.

7. The worship leader is one who can lead with confidence - this will give others confidence as they join him in worship. A worship leader also needs confidence in the ministry God has called him to. Take courage (we're all nervous).

Preparation

I will now look at how we prepare to lead worship: firstly how we prepare *spiritually*, secondly how we prepare *practically*.

Spiritual preparation for worship

1. Keep your heart right before God. There is no such thing as secret sin (Numbers 32:23)! Sin inevitably affects our ministry. We need to be those who are quick to repent - to have lives that are pure and holy before God. The prayer of the worship leader could be that of David in Psalm 51 - particularly vs 10 and 17. God is exposing sin in church leaders today as never before (and not just in the USA). And it is not only the one who is caught in sin who is affected - whole churches can be affected by the sin of a leader. The church, in many ways, has become the laughing stock of the world because we say one thing and do another. I believe there is a spiritual principle here. If we are given higher privileges or responsibilities - there will be higher penalties if we fall! It is sobering to do a study in Scripture concerning this (see, for example, Numbers 20:6-12, 2 Samuel 24, Joshua 7 and Acts 5). Basically what I am saying is, don't take on positions of responsibility lightly.

2. Keep your mind free from sin or distractions before leading worship. It is NOT helpful to watch an episode of Neighbours on TV just before leading worship! Nor is it good to have angry confrontations with others in the church. We need our thoughts fixed on the Lord if we are to clearly hear His voice (Romans 12:2).

3. Keep your motives and ego in God's hands. Just as there is a principle in the world, so too is there a spiritual principle: What goes up must come down! See Luke 14:11. God is constantly reminding us in Wellspring that we are not to consider ourselves as superior to anyone, neither are we to judge - that is God's right alone. I'd like to quote here an extract from an article by an American worship leader, David Boyd.

THE FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM

There is a passage in John 3 where John the Baptist is responding to the questions of some of his disgruntled disciples. They were upset over the fact that Jesus was gaining more followers than John was. His response to this has always impressed me, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven - He must become greater; I must become less."

John's comments address the issue of competition. What I hadn't seen before was the following statement about him being the friend of the bridegroom. The Holy Spirit was saying to me that a worship leader has a role of "a friend of the Bridegroom". As such, his job is to present the Bride to the Bridegroom, that is, present the church to Jesus. John's words in verses 29-30:

"The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for Him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less."

There are a number of profound truths in this passage. First there is a wedding about to take place between Jesus and His bride, the church. Every time we gather to worship there is a taste of the marriage supper of the Lamb spoken of in Revelation, where the spotless and pure bride is finally united with Christ.

Secondly, the worship leader, the friend of the bridegroom has a two-fold job; he is to attend the bridegroom and present the bride to Him.

We often forget that our first priority is to minister to the Lord - this is the primary task of those who are appointed the role of worship leader. The friend of the bridegroom does not rejoice because of the beautiful, desirable woman that is standing before him, he rejoices when he hears the voice of the bridegroom. He is focusing on welcoming the bridegroom, not on entertaining the bride.

The second priority of the worship leader's job is presenting the bride to Jesus...

The third insight God revealed to me is basically a summary of what has been said so far. Think how inappropriate it would be for the best man at a wedding to begin to make advances towards his best friend's wife-to-be! Such a thing would be an offence to everyone in attendance at the wedding! Well, the Lord showed me that this is exactly what happens when we try to feed our ego needs by using the worship platform. It amounts to drawing the praise and adoration that belongs to Jesus onto ourselves.

The affection of the bride rightfully belongs to God alone. It is improper for us to seek the affections of the bride for ourselves that belong to Jesus. That is spiritual adultery, "do not covet another man's wife". For leaders in general, especially pastors and others who stand before the church, there's a danger of doing this when we seek to be approved of, speaking or singing to impress men or women rather than to speak that which will present to Jesus a pure and spotless bride.

4. Draw close to the Lord in prayer - remember, worship and direction springs from our relationship with God. If you are finding your worship leading hard going, fasting can be helpful.

Practical preparation for worship

The principles I am going to share here would seem to infer that you are in the ideal situation: you have complete freedom in your church, lots of time and a whole orchestra of musicians to work with, a large choice of songs and everyone likes everything you do! I know that no-one is in that happy position, so please take what principles you can and apply them to where you are. Pray that God would use whatever you offer to serve Him and that it would also touch hearts. Remember, quality is more important than quantity (remember the widow's mite?). Your attitude of heart is most important (Proverbs 4:23).

So here are a number of questions it would be good to ask as you seek to prepare for worship:

1. What is the Holy Spirit saying

a. *To you*, as you pray. It is important to hear the voice of the Lord - to get direction from Him. It would be good if the material you choose helps the people to go in that direction.

b. *To your church*. Maybe God has spoken clearly recently through a series of talks or sermons. Possibly He has spoken in a prayer meeting in some way or through a prophetic word. Our songs could reflect these words from God. Often the songs we sing are a more powerful way of teaching truth than the purely spoken word (many of the hymns were written as a vehicle for teaching Christian truths to the people).

c. *To the wider church*. I believe God is speaking to us about unity in the body of Christ and a greater call to holiness. Maybe our songs could reflect this.

d. *To this particular meeting*. Here we need to liaise with the leadership of the church (particularly with the one giving the talk) to ensure that our worship fits with the rest of the service or meeting.

2. What songs have an anointing now? In other words, what songs are obviously being used to speak to the people now, which songs are raising their faith? Use anointed songs but don't overdo them or their life and power will be shortened. You will also find that some songs will have more power in the Sunday service than in the midweek meeting. Good! God speaks in different ways in different situations.

3. Are you introducing the right number of new songs? It helps to be feeding in one or two new songs each week, but any more risk hindering the worship. It may help to teach new songs before the service begins. When introducing them, ensure that the melody is clearly heard before there is too much harmonising or improvising in the group.

4. Ensure that songs don't present *theological* problems to people, even if they don't worry you. You are sure to find at some point that someone in your congregation will complain about a song because they believe it to be unscriptural. If you are unable to help them to see the words in a way that will resolve the problem, it is usually better to avoid that song, even if it is your favourite! There are so many songs to choose from these days and it is best not to put stumbling blocks before people.

5. Ensure that songs don't present too many *musical* problems to people. I came across an article by Donald Bridges in which he poses a few questions that we could ask about the songs that we sing. You may not agree with these questions, but they may be worth a look:

a. *Does it help to hear God's word clearly?*

b. *Does it encourage ideas of God's glory?*

c. *Does it humble our humanity and increase our sense of sin?*

d. *Does it encourage disciplined, godly living?*

e. *Does it convey a sense of separation from a godless world?*

f. *Can you imagine its use in a time of spiritual revival?*

g. *Does it influence Christians towards sacrificial, evangelistic mission?*

h. *Would you expect to hear it in heaven?*

6. Are you letting worship develop logically? The pattern we most use is to move from proclamation and praise gradually into intimate worship. Suppose you are in a crowd outside Buckingham Palace and the Queen comes onto the balcony. No doubt you and many thousands of others, would be cheering, clapping and waving flags. If the Queen, however, sends down a personal invitation to you to come into her 'throne room' to meet her, you would probably find a completely different response would be appropriate. This is not the time for loud cheering; it is here that you would bow in reverence, you would speak softly - in fact it might well be inappropriate to say anything at all.

Many times we have seen worship ruined by the use of inappropriate songs at particular times in worship. We need direction in our worship. Where are we starting from? What is our destination? How are we going to get there?

Here is a possible order for songs during the worship time. Remember the throne is the goal!

- a. A few verses of Scripture and songs which are a call to worship.
 - b. Songs of proclamation - who God is, songs of rejoicing or thanksgiving.
 - c. Songs addressed to God, intimate and less doctrinal songs, love songs to Him, possibly singing in the Spirit.
 - d. Songs where we believe that God sings to us (see again Zeph 3:17). Sometimes we use the song 'Lord you are more precious than silver' and we turn the words around to say 'My child, you are more precious than silver' - this is how God sees us!
 - e. All this could lead to a time of silent waiting upon God, or intercession, or ministry to one another or even to a time of higher praise having been in God's presence.
- Psalm 95:1-7 and Psalm 96:1-9 are examples of this direction in worship.

7. Avoid what I call 'bless-ups'! Some celebration events are in the end nothing more than a party (which is fine *occasionally*). Our aim when we gather should be to draw into the presence of God and to respond to the things which are on His heart.

8. Take care with too many key changes. To stay in a key or a related key can really help worship to flow. Abrupt changes of key or style should be reserved for times when a new direction in the meeting is called for by the Spirit.

9. Think about how the people will be given the words for the songs. If they are having to look first at the overhead projector, then the songsheet, then the hymn book, they will soon become distracted. I personally believe that, where practical, overhead projectors are the best. People's heads are raised and their hands are free. I know this can cause some problems with partially sighted people. The best system I've seen used in a church is, as well as using the overhead projector, the acetates most likely to be used in the service were copied onto A4 paper and put into folders for the partially sighted to be given as they came into the service.

It is worth saying that it helps if you have CLEAR acetates with LARGE writing. Have someone operating the overhead projector who knows the job and who is in tune with you spiritually. Ensure that your acetates are not breaking copyright laws. For further information on copyright made simple, write to:

Christian Copyright Licensing Ltd., P.O. Box 1339, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN21 4YF.

10. I find it helpful to write out song lists for myself, for other musicians, for the P.A. and OHP operators and for the leader of the meeting (if requested). I also often have an alternative list of songs which I can turn to if the Spirit seems to be leading in another direction.

11. If you have a liturgical church, consider carefully how the liturgy is used. Many churches use liturgy very badly! Maybe you could consider fitting Bible readings around songs; your worship could lead into a time of intercessions or even be part of the intercessions; allow times of silence; sing or play quietly in communion; consider using classical or solo pieces as a meditation. Our structures *must* allow freedom! A good book on this subject is 'Liturgy and Liberty' by John Leach (MARC Europe).

12. Try to have a breadth of styles in your worship - hymns, modern worship songs, free improvising, different hymn accompaniments, possibly Taizé songs. Too many churches have become bland in their tastes. The Scriptures say to 'sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God' (Col.3:16; Eph.5:19). What does this mean? Psalms could be seen as Scripture set to music (the Psalms were originally accompanied by music); hymns are often great theological truths *about* God - we need to learn these truths; Spiritual songs are songs inspired today by the Holy Spirit - often addressed *to* God. Some people find great difficulty with these modern songs saying that they have little content. I want to ask such people a question. If you are a mother or father and your son or daughter comes up to you and says to you 'I love you', you wouldn't say 'that's all very well, but there's not a lot of content in that!' I believe we need all of these styles in our worship.

Donald Bridge asks makes further comment on this in the article I quoted earlier:

Traditionalist?

To the traditionalist it has to be said:

a. not all hymns are good. Some are terrible; mawkish, doctrinally unsound and in poor taste. Does anyone really want to sing, ' "I'm about to die," said Willie,' or 'Salvation like a bucket is' (yes, really!)?

b. Your traditional hymns (as they are now) were originally considered to be radical, unacceptable and a threat to someone else's traditions. That includes the really glorious compositions of Martin Luther, Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley. In their own day they were criticised as human inventions in danger of displacing the Word of God. Only biblical paraphrases used to be sung.

c. You have every right to go on cherishing and using your own favourite hymns. You have no right at all to prevent other Christians from using their favourites. If you wish them to see the virtue of yours, at least give them the chance to display the virtue of theirs.

d. Doesn't public worship have something to do with praising God together?

Or trendy?

To the trendies it has to be said:

a. Christian worship has very deep roots indeed. What moved and motivated earlier generations might well have something to say to you as well.

b. Don't slip into the snare of what C.S. Lewis called 'chronological snobbery': the fallacy that anything new is automatically an improvement and the converse assumption that anything which has been used for a long time is bound to be worn out and redundant. That may be true of motor cars and washing machines, but you are not a robot.

c. Don't confuse 'spirit' (human) with 'the Spirit' (divine). A song that lifts you up and triggers of joy may be from the Holy Spirit. But it may just be a combination of exciting sounds, emotive chords and a good digestion. Don't imagine that noisy, unstructured worship is automatically 'spiritual' and quiet, structured worship is automatically formalistic. The first supposition is presumptuous and the second impertinent.

The worship group

Ensure your worship group is well rehearsed:

- a. Your first priority as a group should be to learn to worship together and to develop a unity of purpose.
- b. Learn to lead clearly with a clear melody line and clear rhythm. Think carefully about how you use each instrument (e.g. which instrument best sets the tone for a particular song). Organise introductions and endings. If you are a guitarist learn to develop different strumming or picking patterns according to the song you are using.
- c. Ensure that loud instruments (such as drumkits, electric guitars, keyboards etc.) don't dominate. It is important that the leader has the freedom to lead: to get quicker or slower; louder or softer.
- d. Realise that worship leaders are often the ones who receive the bulk of the criticism in the church. The worship ministry is a pioneer ministry where old ground is being broken up - worship leaders are often seen as the agents of change and people usually find change difficult. Worship group members need to protect their leaders and to pray for them (and for each other). Do make suggestions to each other but make sure they are constructive and not destructive.
- e. Ensure that everyone has the same chords and music. Many editions will have different harmonies for the same song, or even different keys.
- f. Learn ways of Communicating with one another to change speeds, songs etc.
- g. Classical musicians need to be trained away from performing to others and to be weaned from relying too heavily on printed music. Some may need to learn to play *under* their ability at times - not cluttering up the song with too many harmonies or arrangements.
- h. Look for different giftings in the group - some will have different anointings to others whilst others will need encouraging to develop their gifts, especially the more naturally shy.
- i. The P.A. team should feel as much part of the group as the musicians. They need to understand what you are trying to achieve or they could completely wreck all your hard work. The priority should be to keep the volume loud enough to assist the congregation to hear clearly and therefore make a significant contribution to the meeting. If a congregation is presented with a 'wall of sound' which prevents them from hearing their own voices, let alone their neighbour's, they are not being led in worship, they are being assaulted. I believe this is a very real danger in many worship ministries today. We have measured the sound produced by some worship groups in meetings and found the levels to be not only dangerously high but actually *illegal!!*

To sum up this section: Our aim is to come into the presence of God. There is a difference between knowing that God is always with us (as He is!), and knowing the *manifest* presence of God. We can, at times, see and experience the result of God's presence. (See 2 Chron. 5:11-14 where the glory of the Lord so fills the temple of God as they worship Him that the priests cannot continue to stand and worship - I long to see this happen more in our meetings)!

It is NOT unspiritual to prepare. There are two equal and opposite dangers:

- a. Not preparing at all. This is potentially very dangerous. I believe it is naive to expect God to give inspiration only at the meeting. If God is going to speak, He can speak beforehand as well.
- b. Being so well prepared that we are unwilling to be flexible when it comes to the meeting itself.

At the meeting

If you are like me, you will probably feel nervous at times when you lead worship. You are in good company! (Paul preached with fear and trembling - 1 Cor. 2:3). Here are a few practical 'helps' which may be useful to you.

1. Pray together before you lead any meeting. This should be the initiative of everyone in the group as the leader may be called away at the last minute.
2. Ensure that you have good eye contact with:
 - a. Others in the group (practice this beforehand)
 - b. the leader of the meeting - in the end it is their responsibility how the meeting develops. Incidentally, it is important to *always* know who is in charge at any particular moment so that chaos doesn't develop!
 - c. The OHP and P.A. operators
3. Be willing to be flexible as you lead. Here is a good test of your ministry: If the leader decides to drop all that you have prepared beforehand, are you willing to accept this with humility?
4. Have someone next to you to prepare your music for you, if you need it, always ready for the next song.
5. If you have to stop, (e.g. for a broken string), ensure that the others in the group know that they are to carry on.
6. As you begin, it can help to encourage those in the congregation to respond to God as they wish. It can help to all stand at the beginning, but after that don't expect them all to continue standing, to clap, to kneel, to dance etc. I believe we should generally be doing on the 'outside' what we're wanting to do on the inside (raising hands, kneeling, dancing etc.)
7. Always be listening to the Spirit of God: What do you want next, Lord?; How should I respond to that talk/prayer/prophecy etc.? You must always obey what God says (John 10:3-4, 1 Sam. 15:22).

8. Allow silence if it seems appropriate. Encourage expectancy in these times - time for God to speak or minister. If necessary let people know that it is time to be quiet or they may feel uncomfortable. It concerns me greatly that in the evangelical and charismatic part of the church we have lost the possibility of silence. A profound silence can be one of the most powerful ways for God to speak to us. With our desire for familiarity with God we have forgotten the mystery, the transcendence, the reverence and awe that surrounds Him. The Bible warns us not to come too hastily into the Lord's presence with words (Eccl. 5:1-2). I believe many of us in the evangelical/charismatic parts of the church will be rather uncomfortable in heaven. In Rev 8:1 it says 'There was silence in heaven for half an hour!' Screwtape, the senior devil in C.S. Lewis' book, The Screwtape Letters, divulges one of the reasons for our world being polluted by continual noise:

"Music and silence - how I detest them both!...no square inch of infernal space and no moment of infernal time has been surrendered to either of those abominable forces, but all has been occupied by Noise - Noise, the grand dynamism, the audible expression of all that is exultant, ruthless and virile...We will make that whole universe a noise in the end. We have already made great strides in this direction as regards the Earth. The melodies and silences of Heaven will be shouted down in the end."

9. As I said before, don't do too much talking or introducing the worship. This is a trap that many worship leaders fall in to. For a start it is probably not your gift anyway. I personally prefer to have a sustained, uninterrupted time with God - wasting time with God! Remember never to chastise those you are leading in worship.

10. Instrumental verses can be helpful or unaccompanied singing. Sometimes just the men or ladies singing. It may be right to lead into singing in the Spirit - but don't force this.

11. Focus on Jesus. Don't attract attention to yourself and try not to be distracted by anything else that is going on in the room; if you do, others will get distracted as well.

12. Don't have your eyes closed *all* the time. This will shut people off from you. If you have your eyes open, it helps you to see what the Spirit is doing amongst the people.

13. Don't allow meetings to develop into what I call 'spiritual bingo'. This is where everyone begins to shout out the numbers of their favourite hymns or songs - this is not being led by the Spirit. In general it is better not to open up meetings too much unless you are with a smallish group of very mature Christians.

14. Allow time, though, for prophecy, prayer etc. - listen to the Spirit for times when instruments may be able to minister for example.

Last general points

1. Ensure that you have (and maintain) good contact with your vicar/pastor/leader of the church. Talk to him, pray with him, affirm one another's gifts and ministries.

2. Ensure that you have a good relationship of mutual respect and communication with the organist or other church music group or leader. Try to share music making together (e.g. the organist could add a bass or even more at times to your songs or the instrumentalists could join in the anthems) - maybe the choir could join the worship group at times. It is very important, if you have a number of different worship teams in your church, that you all get together regularly to seek the Lord for a common vision. We should be seeking a common goal, not all setting our own agendas.

3. In this ministry there is always the danger of the worship group being seen as a clique. Ensure that you continue to mix with others in your congregation and change the faces and numbers that are involved week by week in the group if you can. Involve the children sometimes too - it is amazing how this can break down barriers!

4. Lastly, when you feel you have little to offer, remember praise is because God is worthy - not because we feel like it! Sometimes it is a sacrifice to worship God - but such a sacrifice is pleasing to God (see Heb 13:15 and Hab 3:17-18).

Richard Williamson



RICHARD WILLIAMSON was born in Sydney, Australia. In 1976 he came to England and has since played regularly as a principal viola player with professional Orchestras and Chamber Ensembles throughout the UK and abroad.

In his early years as a Christian, he attended Holy Trinity Brompton Church in London before moving to Manchester in 1983. After running a number of celebration evenings for churches in the Manchester area, he formed the worship group 'Wellspring'. Wellspring has led worship for many events throughout Britain and abroad.

Richard now lives in Poynton, Cheshire and is married to Susan (another member of Wellspring). They have three children, Sam, Matthew and David.