

“The moment I met Bob Kauflin I liked him (a lot!). The more I have gotten to know him, the more I have respected and appreciated him. The more I have listened to and read him on the subject of the corporate worship of our gracious God, the more I have been edified, instructed, humbled, and helped. Whether you are a choir director or minister of music in a congregation with a more traditional form of public worship or a worship team leader in a church with a more contemporary style or a pastor trying to think hard (and biblically) about congregational worship or a Christian wanting to make sure you understand the privilege of ‘giving to the Lord the glory due his name in the company of the saints’ in a way that helpfully prepares you to do just that, this book will be a blessing to you (as it already has been to me). The things that Bob addresses here transcend style and situation and point us to enduring and universal Christian priorities. I love the wisdom—the Christ-exalting, gospel-derived wisdom—displayed in the challenge Bob asks us to consider, the important things he calls us to, the tasks he reminds us of, the tensions that he bids us hold, and the right relationships he exhorts us to embrace. Very wise. Very timely. Profoundly biblical, theological, devotional, pastoral, and practical. Thanks, Bob. I am your debtor once again.”

—LIGON DUNCAN, Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church,
Jackson, Mississippi; President, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals;
Adjunct Professor, Reformed Theological Seminary

“Humility. Self-deprecating humor. Practical wisdom. And not just for music leaders. What a refreshing read! I’ve gained from Bob Kauflin, and if you read this, you will too. Clearly structured, well illustrated, engagingly written, biblically saturated, theologically careful, this book gives us a rich treatise on how we can follow Christ ourselves and call others to do the same. This book helps musicians, pastors, elders, and other Christians understand better what we’re called to do when we’re together.”

—MARK DEVER, Pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church;
head of 9Marks Ministries

“God is seeking those who worship him in spirit and in truth. Bob Kauflin is a man whose passion for true worship is both infectious and instructive. In *Worship Matters* he offers profound and powerful observations about the task of leading God’s people in worship—observations missing from much of the conversation about worship today. Bob Kauflin is driven by a passion for God’s glory, and his reflections on music and worship are grounded in biblical truth and keen theological insight. In a day of such confusion about worship, I welcome this important book.”

—R. ALBERT MOHLER JR., President, The Southern Baptist Theological
Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

“For some years Sovereign Grace Ministries has blessed the church with music that greatly enhances worship. I have been moved especially by their music CDs, which combine solid biblical doctrine, music skillfully played and sung, and a great passion for Christ. One rarely finds these qualities combined with such balance. That is a gift of God’s grace, but also (by God’s grace) the result of careful thinking. Now we have

access to that thinking, in Bob Kauflin’s wonderful *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God*. This book is thoroughly biblical, comprehensive, balanced, clear, and engaging. Worship leaders must read it, and it will be a great help to anyone interested in finding out what biblical worship is about and how to worship from the heart.”

—JOHN FRAME, Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy,
Reformed Theological Seminary

“In every conversation or correspondence I’ve had with Bob Kauflin, one thing always shines through—a burning desire to ‘get it right’ when it comes to the worship of God. Bob loves God, values theology, and cares about people. This mix is found throughout this wonderful and helpful book. *Worship Matters* will inspire you as a worshiper and spur you on as a leader of worship.”

—MATT REDMAN, lead worshiper and song-writer, Brighton, UK

“Here is a rare book: a practical treatment of corporate worship that nevertheless reflects deep theological commitments. One may disagree here and there with some of the judgments, but it is demonstrably unfair to imagine that Bob Kauflin has not thought about these matters deeply—and he has done so in a context where he is teaching a new generation to take corporate worship seriously in a fashion that is simultaneously biblically faithful and addressing today’s culture.”

—D. A. CARSON, Research Professor of New Testament,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“Bob Kauflin has written an amazingly rich and wise book on worship. It is biblical, Christ-honoring, relevant, practical, enjoyable, and everything else I could have asked for. It’s full of tested insights, coming out of the author’s disciplined contemplation and long experience as a leader among worship leaders. I know and respect Bob and have thoroughly enjoyed following his lead in worshipping our Lord. Bob lives what he writes; so his emphasis on character, integrity, and humility has credibility. I enthusiastically recommend this book to all who wish to cultivate in our churches deeper and more Christ-centered worship.”

—RANDY ALCORN, author of *Heaven* and *The Treasure Principle:
Unlocking the Secrets of Joyful Giving*

“Rich and glorious theology, discerning and judicious insight, faithful and seasoned experience, practical and humble wisdom—these are some of the marked qualities of Bob Kauflin’s treasure trove, *Worship Matters*. With deep concern both for the rightful glory of God and for the edification of God’s people through responsible and heart-felt worship, Kauflin provides an array of insights and instruction covering many practical issues, all of which are wrapped in an overarching theology of the triune God, the gospel of grace, and the centrality of the cross. What a needed contribution to our understanding of the nature and practice of worship. May the vision of God and the

model of worship conveyed by Kauflin spread widely and enrich many churches, for the glory of God's great name."

—BRUCE WARE, Professor of Christian Theology, Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary

"Bob Kauflin is my favorite worship leader, but for reasons that may be surprising to some. Sure, he is an exceptional pianist, songwriter, pastor, and leader, but it's his humility and heart to serve that sets him apart. I know of no man more qualified to write this book than Bob. And I know of no more important, useful work for those who would lead God's people in worship than *Worship Matters*."

—C. J. MAHANEY, Sovereign Grace Ministries

"I've known Bob Kauflin for many years, and he is truly a remarkable man. First, he's tall—really tall. Second, he manages to combine a widely-read, biblically grounded, deep-thinking spiritual maturity with enthusiasm, passion, and a depth of commitment that puts me to shame. That's a pretty powerful combination in one man. When he told me he was writing a book on worship, I was excited. And I have not been disappointed. Bob's approach is humble, yet authoritative; comprehensive, yet inspirational. And if you take his gentle but clear teaching onboard, it will help make you fully equipped in mind, heart, and spirit to lead others in worship. I wholeheartedly recommend it."

—STUART TOWNSEND, Christian song-writer

"It rings true! This is how I continually reacted to *Worship Matters* as I made my way through it. It rings true because Bob Kauflin rings true. I know him; I have worked and fellowshiped with him; we e-mail each other somewhat regularly. He has always been ointment to my battered and redeemed life, and his personal example continues to humble me. But this book above all rings true because Bob rings true to his God, his Word, his Son, his Spirit, and God's relentless desire for the nations through the completed work of his only Son. Thus, page after page Bob brings his work under the scrutiny of the Word; he summons the worship and music of the people of God to its commandments, instructions, and promises, and he does so with clarity and order. So what he says in his book and how he lives his personal and vocational life are entirely consonant. *Worship Matters* should matter deeply to those for whom it is primarily written: young, eager, Christ-centered musician-leaders—people who, at least for the present, are called worship leaders and on whose shoulders a heavy burden has been thrust. The author's wisdom shows continually. His ability to simplify the complex without cheapening it; his rich artistic eclecticism; his love for great music; his insistence on theological and doctrinal literacy; his respect for church history and its various worship and musical dialects; his passion for sensible speech, rich prayer, soul-deepening books; and his obvious freedom from the very practices to which he gives his attention—in this case, contemporary worship leading—these together make this a necessary book. Were the young to read it honestly and be deeply changed by it, were the old to see in it something beyond the 'contemporary,' were all of us to understand that new, old, and everything in between have no life in themselves and must be

continually rescued both from self-conscious novelty and self-preserving stodginess, that would bring much needed reform to the unnecessarily confused worlds of worship and music making.”

—HAROLD M. BEST, author of *Music Through the Eyes of Faith* and
Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts

“Bob Kauflin’s new book *Worship Matters* is an outstanding book both for those who lead worship and also for every Christian who wants to worship God more fully. The book is biblical, practical, interesting, wise, and thorough in its treatment of the topic. Though it treats many practical details, it rightly puts primary emphasis on the worship leader’s character and relationship to God, and on the Bible’s own teaching about worship. The next time I teach on worship, I plan to make this the required text.”

—WAYNE GRUDEM, Research Professor of Bible and Theology,
Phoenix Seminary

“Bob Kauflin combines musical expertise with theological and pastoral insight. With clarity and passion, he gives biblical and practical guidance to those responsible for leading congregational worship, and in the process builds creative bridges between evangelical and charismatic traditions.”

—DAVID PETERSON, author of *Engaging with God*

“No one has taught me more about worship than Bob Kauflin. If he were just a veteran musician and worship leader, he’d deserve a hearing. If he were only a skilled teacher with a zeal for biblical theology, you would be wise to pay attention. If he were simply a skilled pastor with a heart to see Christians grow in their knowledge of and love for God, you could learn from him. But he’s not just one—he’s all three. Bob is a pastor, a teacher, and a skilled musician. And this book captures his heart, his zealous pursuit of God, and his many years of real-life experience leading worship. That’s why his book deserves the careful study of pastors and worship leaders alike.”

—JOSHUA HARRIS, Senior Pastor, Covenant Life Church,
Gaithersburg, Maryland



Leading Others to
Encounter the Greatness of God

WORSHIP MATTERS

Bob Kauflin
foreword by Paul Baloche

CROSSWAY BOOKS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Worship Matters

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Published by Crossway Books

a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers

1300 Crescent Street

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Jon McGrath

Cover illustration: iStock

First printing, 2008

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kauffman, Bob.

Worship matters : leading others to encounter the greatness of God /

Bob Kauffman.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-58134-824-8 (tpb)

I. Worship—Biblical teaching. I. Title.

BS680.W78K38 2008

264—dc22

2007041082

DP	18	17	15	14	13	12	11	10	09	08				
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

FOREWORD

The first worship conference that I ever attended was just outside of Philadelphia in 1984. Bob Kauflin was one of the speakers. It was an eye-opening experience that inspired in me the dream of being involved in music that had the potential to help people truly worship God.

Bob's passion for the Lord lit up in his face as he led us in song and taught from the Scriptures. Being raised in a denomination where drums and prayers never mixed, this was a totally new experience for me. The music Bob was talking about was powerful in the way that it could impact others both immediately and eternally. My high-school years were spent playing in various garage bands, highlighted by occasional gigs around Philadelphia bars or clubs along the Jersey Shore. Besides the occasional "folk mass," I had never heard others singing to God with guitars in their hands. That day was the beginning of my journey to encourage others in their walk in the Lord. I wanted to do what Bob Kauflin did. I wanted to encourage others as I had been encouraged. As the years have passed I've crossed paths with Bob at various events, and I always walk away wanting to be a better husband, a better father, and a better lover of God. Those are the qualities in Bob that inspire me more than anything.

In *Worship Matters*, Bob leads us skillfully through the Scriptures and through his experiences to better understand the why and how of biblical worship, regardless of the style or form. From the spiritual aspects of cultivating a devotional life, to the practicalities of putting together a song list, he unfolds the essentials required to effectively fulfill the call of God on our lives. Thankfully, Bob is brutally honest about his own struggles with music, ministry, ego, identity, and failure. If you have been involved in any kind of music ministry, you can't help but see yourself in the mirror of his personal anecdotes. I have wrestled with many of the same issues over the years and found great insight and hope from Bob's conversational confessions in this book.

Bob Kauflin is an important voice in this season of worship-style wars, pointing us to the point of it all—pointing us to the Savior. This is an essential book for anyone considering a role of any kind in worship ministry. As

Foreword

Jesus shared in the Sermon on the Mount, we can build our lives (or ministries) on the rock or on the sand. The truths in this book are rock-solid and vital to any foundation for lasting ministry. It is the most complete and most readable discussion on the art and the heart of worship that I have ever read. As a worship pastor for the past eighteen years, I felt personally challenged to reexamine and rethink some of the ways that I approach and conduct worship ministry in my own life.

So for those who are just beginning their journey and for those who have been on this road awhile, get ready to be inspired to love your God even more by “putting away childish things” and “pressing on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of you.”

Paul Baloche

THE IMPORTANT THINGS

It was my dream job. I'd just become Director of Worship Development for Sovereign Grace Ministries. After pastoring for twelve years, I was now studying worship and training worship leaders full-time.

I was leading worship at a conference and should have been exhilarated. After praying with the worship team I headed up the stairs to start the meeting. The room was overflowing, the atmosphere electric. Every heart was ready to praise God.

Well, almost. From the outside I'm sure no one could tell what *I* was thinking. That was a good thing.

As I made my way to the stage, I suddenly found myself battling doubts.

What difference will this make tonight? Will it have any eternal value? People will sing, raise their hands, get excited . . . and go home. And I'll do this over and over and over again. For the rest of my life.

Suddenly it all seemed empty. Dry. Pointless.

Ever been there? Have you found yourself wondering where your joy went or if what you do really matters?

A friend of mine confided that one of his greatest struggles in leading worship is fighting the feeling that he has to “get up and do it again” for the two-hundredth time. He has to resist going through the motions and simply “mailing it in.”

I don't think he's alone.

IS THIS WHAT I SIGNED UP FOR?

Don't get me wrong. I think leading God's people in worship is one of the most fulfilling, enjoyable, exciting, sobering, life-changing jobs on the planet. We're helping people connect with the purpose for which they were created—to glorify the living God. We're pointing their hearts toward the Sovereign One who is greater than their trials and kinder than they could ever imagine. We get to display the matchless Savior who died in our place, conquering sin, death, and hell in the process.

We watch in amazement as the Spirit of God transforms lives and gives people a fresh encounter with God's faithfulness, love, and power.

At times like these we think, *I can't believe I get to do this.* (And if you're on a church staff, you might add, "I can't believe I get *paid* to do this.")

But then come the times we'd be happy to pay someone *else* to do this.

- Your lead vocalist is sick, your bass player's out of town, and your keyboardist slept in. And no one called to find a sub.

- A small but influential group in the church just informed the pastor they don't like the songs you've been teaching.

- After two years in your new church, you still don't have a drummer who can keep steady time.

- Your best singer just told you she's not coming to this week's rehearsal unless she gets to sing the solo.

- For the fifth week in a row, your pastor e-mailed to say the music went too long and you talked too much.

Moments like these make you think that leading worship would be a joy if it didn't involve working with others.

But just as often we struggle with our own hearts:

- No one seems to appreciate or even notice that on top of a full-time job you put in at least ten hours each week for the worship team.

- The last time you taught a new song was eight months ago, and CDs are piled on your desk that you still haven't listened to.

- You put off confronting a guitarist whose critical and proud attitude is affecting the whole team.

- You can't remember the last time you prayed more than five minutes, and you feel like a hypocrite as you lead on Sundays.

- You never have enough hours to plan, prepare, study, practice, or work with the music team. Which makes you wonder what in the world you're doing with your time.

And yet . . .

Despite these and other difficulties, you believe the joys of leading worship far outweigh the challenges. You wouldn't think of giving it up.

You just want to do it better. More effectively. More skillfully. More faithfully.

I'm guessing that's why you picked up this book. I hope so because that's why I wrote it.

But I have to confess something.

I didn't write this book simply to help you be a better worship leader. There's more at stake here.

After thirty years of leading worship, I've realized that worship isn't just an opportunity to use my musical gifts. It's more than a heightened emotional experience or a way to make a living. It's way more than what we do on Sunday morning.

Worship is about what we love. What we live for.

It's about who we are before God.

This book is filled with practical ideas for leading worship. But we don't start there. These initial chapters are about the way we think and live. I want to challenge, encourage, and inspire you to live your life for the glory and praise of Jesus Christ. Holding nothing back. Giving no ground. It's the only kind of life that makes sense for someone who leads worship.

But first, a little background.

HOW I GOT HERE

My first experience of music in a church context came as a Catholic, when I played the organ for Masses, weddings, and funerals. There wasn't much "leadership" involved. I just played what I was told. When I could, I'd sneak in "sacred" versions of Beatles tunes, college fight songs, or nursery rhymes to make it interesting.

In the early seventies, I majored in piano at Temple University in Philadelphia. I became a Christian during my first year and started visiting a Baptist church on campus. When my friends and I noticed we were the only people in the church under sixty, we tried starting our own church in the dorms. That lasted two meetings.

Then someone invited us to a charismatic church in Center City Philadelphia. We heard the meetings were pretty lively, especially when they broke into line dancing around the pews. I helped with the worship team there and eventually was asked to lead, to use the term generously.

Between my junior and senior years at Temple, I came across a small, humble group of Christians in rural Pennsylvania who claimed Scripture as

their only doctrine. The women wore head coverings, the men had beards, and they sang without instruments.

My worship world was diversifying.

After getting married and graduating from college in 1976, my wife, Julie, and I spent eight years with the Christian music group GLAD. We traveled across the U.S. learning what worship meant to Baptists, Assemblies of God, Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and a host of nondenominational churches.

Some churches followed centuries-old liturgies. Others were “Spirit-filled” and looked for God to show up in prophetic words, tongues, or some other spontaneous event.

In too many churches we detected a disconnect between the God they worshiped on Sundays and the one they seemed to follow during the week.

I continued to lead worship in my local church when we weren’t traveling. But in 1984 I said good-bye to life on the road. I thought I might be called to be a pastor.

The following year I joined the staff of a church related to Sovereign Grace Ministries, led by C. J. Mahaney. I led the worship team there for six years, then helped plant what’s now Crossway Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. I experienced firsthand the challenges and joys of overseeing a worship team in a new church.

In 1997 C. J. invited me to Covenant Life Church, a congregation of 3,000-plus members near Washington, D.C., to serve in my present role. As you might guess, leading worship in a large congregation is different from a church plant. More people to organize, more songs to learn, more meetings to work around, more equipment to deal with, and more potential problems.

But the important things haven’t changed.

This book is about the important things.

WHAT REALLY MATTERS?

Maybe you’re just getting started as a worship leader or think God wants you to be one. Perhaps you’ve been in music ministry for decades and are feeling a little weary. You might be part of a music team or a worship planning committee. Maybe you’re a pastor and want to understand more clearly what worship is supposed to look like in your church. Or it could be you’re the kind of person who wants to get your hands on anything that feeds your love for God.

Whatever your situation, I want to help you avoid going through what

I described at the beginning of this chapter—when I stepped up to lead worship, and it all seemed empty, dry, and pointless. It isn't.

But the Lord graciously reminded me, “That’s exactly what it would be like without me—pointless.”

Worship matters. It matters to God because he is the one ultimately worthy of all worship. It matters to us because worshiping God is the reason for which we were created. And it matters to every worship leader, because we have no greater privilege than leading others to encounter the greatness of God. That’s why it’s so important to think carefully about what we do and why we do it.

Discovering what matters in worship is a journey I’ve been on for thirty years, and one I’ll be on for the rest of my life. I’m glad you’ve joined me.

And if you don’t feel adequate for the task . . . you’re in the perfect place for God to use you.

chapter 2

MY HEART; WHAT DO I LOVE?

What's the greatest challenge you face as a worship leader? You might think it's deciding which songs to sing, getting along with your pastor, receiving feedback from church members, or leading a team of unorganized, independent musicians.

Nope. Your greatest challenge is what you yourself bring to the platform each and every Sunday.

Your heart.

For years we've read about or experienced firsthand the "worship wars"—conflicts over music styles, song selections, and drums. But far too little has been said about the worship wars going on inside us. And they're much more significant.

Each of us has a battle raging within us over what we love most—God or something else.

Whenever we love and serve anything in place of God, we're engaging in idolatry. We love our idols because we think they'll provide the joy that comes from God alone. We think having them will truly satisfy us. We think they're worthy of our worship.

Of course, we're wrong.

Throughout Scripture, idolatry is the greatest snare the people of God encounter. God condemns idolatry repeatedly in his Word. He hates it when we pursue, serve, or are emotionally drawn to other gods, which are not really gods at all. Idols enslave us and put us to shame (Isaiah 45:16; Psalm

106:36). The apostle John warned his readers and us, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). Idols are powerless to help us and end up making us into their own image (Psalm 115:8). Like David, we should hate idols and those who pay regard to them (Psalm 31:6). Too often, though, we ourselves are the idolaters.

When some of us hear the word *idolatry*, we picture primitive tribesmen bowing down to statues of wood, metal, or stone. Or we think of countries like India where Hindu temples dot the landscape. When I went to train pastors in India years ago, I met many men who had grown up worshiping idols as a daily ritual.

But idol worship is a daily ritual in America, too. Only it’s more subtle and therefore more dangerous.

Idols are all around us. Can you spot them? They come in different forms. Material comforts. Financial security. Sensual pleasures. Musicians have their own special idols. New gear. Electronic gadgets. Hip clothes. The most powerful idols are the ones we can’t even see. Things like reputation, power, and control.

As Christians we’re sometimes like the people described in 2 Kings 17:33: “they feared the LORD but also served their own gods.” We fear the Lord externally, doing all the right things on Sunday morning—singing, strumming a guitar, lifting our hands—yet actively serve false gods throughout the week. We profess to love the true God but actually love false idols. It’s a condition that God, in his mercy, is committed to changing.

That’s a lesson I learned the hard way.

IDOLS AND ME

I spent most of my early years seeking my own glory. Popularity, music, and academic excellence were my idols of choice, and I spent most of my teenage years pursuing them. When God saved me at seventeen, my sins were completely forgiven. But I had deep-rooted sin patterns that weren’t going to die easily.

After becoming a pastor, I assumed my job was to serve others with my superior wisdom and discernment. My pride was exposed a few times, and patient friends tried to help me see what was going on in my heart. But I was a slow learner.

When we moved to North Carolina to help start a church, my cravings for admiration and control were constantly challenged. Some people didn’t like the way we were leading the church and left. A few disgruntled parents expressed disagreement with our parent-driven youth ministry. Newcomers

recommended ways the church could serve them better. A counseling situation turned ugly when a man caught in immorality claimed that I lacked compassion and had gotten angry at him.

No one knew it at the time, but God was using these situations and others to expose the long-standing sins of idolatry in my heart. I wanted everyone around me to share my high opinion of myself. My life was one extended attempt to draw attention to my gifts, my abilities, and my efforts. But it wasn't working. I wasn't getting the praise I craved, and that was affecting my soul. I increasingly struggled with feelings of anxiety, fear, and confusion. I felt like my life was about to fall apart.

One January evening in 1994 it did.

A family in the church had invited Julie and me over for dinner. In between bites, as we were engaging in small talk, I lost my grip on reality. I couldn't tell you how it happened, but in an instant I felt completely disconnected from both my past and my future. Resisting the sudden urge to jump up from the table and scream, I excused myself, went into the bathroom, and shut the door behind me.

God, what in the world is happening to me? Where are you? Who am I?

No answers came as questions raced through my mind at warp speed.

That night I began a sanctifying journey that would last nearly three years. God wanted to teach me a few things about what I loved and who I worshiped.

HOPELESS—BUT NOT ENOUGH

Over the next three months I experienced a variety of symptoms. Hollowness and tightness in my chest. Buzzing in my face. Daily thoughts of death. Itching on my arms. Panic attacks. Sleeplessness. Shortness of breath.

I woke up each morning to this thought: *Your life is completely hopeless.* And things went downhill from there.

I chose not to go to a psychologist or psychiatrist, but I'm certain they would have classified me as someone having a breakdown. I made an appointment for a complete physical with our family doctor, who said I was fine. At least that's what the tests showed.

But the tests couldn't measure what was taking place in my heart. I was battling God for his glory—and losing.

About a year after these symptoms appeared, Julie and I attended a leadership conference and shared a meal with our good friends Gary and Betsy Ricucci. I knew Gary was a wise and gracious pastor. I also knew I needed

help. Desperately. Early in our conversation I confessed, “Gary, I don’t know what to do. I feel hopeless all the time. Completely hopeless.”

I expected Gary to say something like, “You’ll be okay, Bob. God is faithful. He’s working all things for your good.” Instead he looked at me with compassion and stated, “I don’t think you’re hopeless enough.”

I’m not sure what the look on my face said at that moment, but inside I was picking myself up off the floor.

Gary smiled. “If you were really hopeless, you’d stop trusting in yourself and what you can do and start trusting in what Jesus accomplished for you at the cross.”

The words drifted into my head like morning fog over a field—there was a discernible shape, but I couldn’t quite get my arms around it.

As I considered Gary’s response in the coming weeks, the fog began to lift. I started seeing a reality that dominated my life—the reality of my sinful cravings. My problems—emotional, physical, and otherwise—stemmed from battles within my heart of which I’d been largely unaware. Yes, I wanted God to be exalted through my life, but another agenda was ruling my heart. I wanted people to approve of me, admire me, *applaud* me.

To be honest, I wanted people to *adore* me. I had an incessant passion to steal God’s glory. I was a lover of myself rather than a lover of God (2 Timothy 3:2, 4). And it was killing me. The unresolved conflict in my heart spilled over into my mind and body and led to that fateful January night in 1994.

BREAKING DOWN THE BREAKDOWN

So what happened to me? Many would call it a nervous breakdown. I’ve learned that it was far simpler than that. And far more serious.

I was experiencing the consequences of my pride. A sin breakdown, if you will. God in his kindness was mercifully humbling me and showing me what life would be like without him.

I’d been in a relentless pursuit of glory. I relished hearing my name mentioned, reading my name in print, and being commended by others for my wisdom, my musical gifts, my parenting, and my care—even my humility. I’d grown increasingly offended when people found fault with anything I did. I bristled inwardly when someone questioned my integrity, gifting, or planning. I tried to avoid any kind of criticism and worked hard to persuade others that I was an exceptional (but humble) Christian, pastor, and worship leader.

Some people would characterize my condition as a chronic people-

pleaser. A more apt description was a people-worshiper. I was striving to gain the approval of those whose approval was of no eternal significance. I'd failed to see that the only approval that matters—God's—is impossible to earn but is offered as a gift through the gospel.

And it was the gospel that set me free.

Gary had been right. I'd felt hopeless, but not hopeless enough. I knew Jesus died on the cross to save sinners from God's wrath, enduring in our place the punishment we deserved. I understood that I couldn't save myself. I just didn't think of myself as a very great sinner. Which meant I didn't need a very great Savior.

When I sought glory for myself, praise for my accomplishments, and credit for my growth, I wasn't depending on a Savior—I was searching for an audience.

God used various people and means to transform my heart. I know my wife will receive significant rewards on the last day for her support, correction, and love during that time. My friends gave me much insightful and patient counsel. Jerry Bridges's book *The Discipline of Grace* and John Owen's treatises on *Sin and Temptation* also proved to be meaningful channels of grace through which the Spirit encouraged my sin-weary soul.

Today the gospel—which I so frequently assumed but so often failed to apply—is the center and foundation of my daily life. I continue to learn about the pervasive power of sin and the greater power of Jesus Christ to redeem me from it. I love Jesus more than I ever thought I would or could.

Why have I shared all this? Because I want to make it clear from the start that worship isn't primarily about music, techniques, liturgies, songs, or methodologies. It's about our hearts. It's about what and who we love more than anything.

Here's my sobering discovery. I learned that I could lead others in worshipping God and be worshipping something else in my own heart. But by the grace of God, I was beginning to understand what worship is all about.

LOVE AND WORSHIP

In my pride I had lost sight of what really matters. I had overlooked what couldn't be clearer in Scripture. Jesus said the greatest commandment is this: "You shall *love* the Lord your God with all your *heart* and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37, emphasis added). While it's simplistic to say that worship is love, it's a fact that what we love most will determine what we genuinely worship.

God wants us to love him more than our instruments and music. More than our possessions, food, and ministry. More than our wife and children.

More than our own lives.

That doesn't mean we can't love anything else. Or that we shouldn't love anything else. But we can't love anything in the right way unless we love God more. Our desires will be out of whack. We'll look to temporary pleasures like concerts, video games, and sports to fulfill eternal desires. We'll love things that aren't as worthy as God to be loved.

How do I know what I love the most? By looking at my life outside of Sunday morning. What do I enjoy the most? What do I spend the most time doing? Where does my mind drift to when I don't have anything to do? What am I passionate about? What do I spend my money on? What makes me angry when I don't get it? What do I feel depressed without? What do I fear losing the most?

Our answers to those questions will lead us straight to the God or gods we love and worship.

That's why as worship leaders our primary concern can't be song preparation, creative arrangements, or the latest cool gear. Our primary concern has to be the state of our hearts.

The great hymn-writer Isaac Watts once wrote:

The Great God values not the service of men, if the heart be not in it: The Lord sees and judges the heart; he has no regard to outward forms of worship, if there be no inward adoration, if no devout affection be employed therein. It is therefore a matter of infinite importance, to have the whole heart engaged steadfastly for God.¹

A matter of *infinite importance*.

Is it a matter of *infinite importance* to you?

Unquestionably it is to God. And when it becomes a matter of infinite importance to us, we're beginning to grasp the heart of leading worship.

Chapter 2: My Heart: What Do I Love?

1. Isaac Watts, *Discourses on the Love of God*, printed by J. Catnach, 1798, 12.

Chapter 3: My Mind: What Do I Believe?

1. Charles Spurgeon, Sermon #542 on 2 Timothy 4:13, November 29, 1863. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 9 (1863); www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0542.htm.

Chapter 4: My Hands: What Do I Practice?

1. From a message called “More Desirable Than Gifts,” given at the Sovereign Grace Small Group Leaders Conference, 1998.
2. “What Unites Us in Worship at Bethlehem?”; http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2003/1241_What_Unites_Us_in_Worship_at_Bethlehem/.
3. Among the many online music theory courses available, I’d check out www.musictheory.ca. Also Sibelius sells a comprehensive theory course called Musition at www.sibelius.com/products/musition.
4. Guitarists should check out the Learn & Master Guitar series at <http://www.learnandmasterguitar.com>.

Chapter 5: My Life: What Do I Model?

1. See 2 Corinthians 6:7; Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6; Titus 2:8.
2. An excellent study on why we use the words we do is Paul Tripp’s *War of Words* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000).
3. One of the best resources I’ve found in the fight against sexual temptation is *Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is)* by Joshua Harris (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2005).

Chapter 6: So What Does a Worship Leader Do?

1. Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *A Brief History of Christian Music* (Oxford, UK: Lion Hudson, 1997).
2. Gordon MacDonald, “To Find a Worship Leader,” *Leadership Journal*, Spring 2002.
3. Tony Payne interview with D. A. Carson, *The Briefing*, Issue #232, Matthias Media, 2000.
4. Throughout this book I use masculine pronouns when I’m talking about an individual worship leader. There are a number of reasons for this. First, I believe Scripture teaches a complementarian view of manhood and womanhood. That is, men and women are both created in the image of God and are of equal worth before God, but he has assigned them different but equally valuable roles in the family and in the church. A helpful resource on this topic is *Fifty Crucial Questions* by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, published by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and available online at <http://www.cbmw.org/Store/Books/50-Crucial-Questions>. Second,