

“The modern role of the worship leader . . . has emerged in recent years as a mission-critical position on church staffs,” writes Zac Hicks. But how do we characterize that role? With years of contemporary worship-leading experience, theological acumen, love of the church, and profound respect for the calling of leading God’s people in declaring his glory, Hicks identifies the role as pastor. Hicks explores perspectives that will inspire worship leaders and ennoble the worship practices and priorities of God’s people.

—DR. BRYAN CHAPELL, pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church;
author, *Christ-centered Worship*

Zac Hicks has laid down some important principles for worship leaders to function beyond merely choosing songs—as pastors. Worship leaders who adapt Zac’s principles and disciplines will find that their call to ministry will be widely enhanced to the glory of God.

—DR. EDWIN M. WILLMINGTON, director, Fred Bock
Institute of Music, Fuller Theological Seminary

It’s been fifty years since the first forms of contemporary worship appeared. It’s been thirty years since the position of worship leader developed. It’s been twenty years since mainline churches adopted contemporary styles. And so it’s time for a mature, multifaceted guide for those who lead God’s people in worship. Zac Hicks’ *The Worship Pastor* fills that need wonderfully.

—LESTER RUTH, research professor of Christian worship, Duke Divinity School

In *The Worship Pastor*, Zac Hicks holds up the diamond of worship leading and wonderfully encourages us in its many faceted roles, reflecting the glory of the gospel with every view. This book is a must-read for pastors, worship pastors, and even worship team members.

—STEVE AND VIKKI COOK, songwriters, teachers, worship leader/team member

If I could choose one worship pastor to serve with for the rest of my life, it would be Zac Hicks. Marinate in his book, *Worship Pastor*, and you’ll understand why my words aren’t pastoral hyperbole. Get it; soak in it; share it with many.

—DR. SCOTTY WARD SMITH, teacher-in-residence, West End Community Church

This book is an invitation to envision the identity of all of us who lead God’s people in worship. My prayer is that it will encourage and inspire both beginning and lifelong leaders of God’s people, and lead to worship of greater theological depth and Christian joy.

—JOHN D. WITVLIET, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship,
Calvin College and Theological Seminary

Long has the worship community needed a guidebook for understanding that the role of the worship leader encompasses more than great music. I highly recommend *The Worship Pastor* to anyone seeking to follow God’s call to lead worship.

—DR. VERNON M. WHALEY, dean, School of Music, Liberty University

As worship pastor becomes a standard job title in churches across the globe, we are in dire need of a guide for this unique vocation. Zac Hicks has given us a masterpiece that is equal parts manual and manifesto. This book is pastoral theology at its very best.

—GLENN PACKIAM, pastor, New Life Downtown;
author, *Discover the Mystery of Faith*

This book is a welcome introduction to the multidimensional nature of worship leadership. Written for practitioners by a practitioner, Hicks brings a convincing voice to the slow-growing but much-needed plea for worship leaders to take up the pastoral duties that are so vital for successful ministry. I highly recommend it for persons in any stage of worship ministry.

—CONSTANCE M. CHERRY, professor of worship and
pastoral ministry, Indiana Wesleyan University

Zac Hicks educates and challenges us to carefully consider how we “do” our function as congregational leaders of prayer, all the while christening us with an elevated title that suits the role: the worship pastor.

—CHUCK FROMM, founder, *Worship Leader Magazine*

Zac has thoughtfully and thoroughly addressed the many creative avenues in which worship can be pastored. And that’s so important, because techie artists like me need a better, deeper theological understanding of the influence we have over the worship space. And how we may actually be worship pastors even though it’s not in our job title.

—STEPHEN PROCTOR, visual liturgist and projection artist, illuminate.us

Not only is this book well-written, it is deeply wise and consistently scriptural. I love this book. I wish that every worship pastor (and every pastor) would read it. Read it. You will be pleasantly surprised.

—ELYSE M. FITZPATRICK, author; *Home: How Heaven
and the New Earth Satisfy Our Deepest Longings*

Leading worship is a high and important calling, and leaders need the tools and resources to pull it off each Sunday. This book provides those resources and the inspiration that worship pastors need each week and in their own lives. There is no better guide than Zach Hicks.

—JIM BELCHER, PhD, president, Providence Christian College

Speaking from years of personal experience, Zac Hicks offers this winsome invitation to worship leaders to think of themselves as ministers as well as musicians. Essential reading.

—MAGGI DAWN, associate professor of theology
and literature, Yale Divinity School

THE WORSHIP PASTOR

THE WORSHIP PASTOR

A CALL TO MINISTRY FOR WORSHIP
LEADERS AND TEAMS

ZAC HICKS



ZONDERVAN

The Worship Pastor

Copyright © 2016 by Zachary M. Hicks

This title is also available as a Zondervan ebook.

Requests for information should be addressed to:
Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

ISBN 978-0-310-52519-6

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.Zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version. Public domain.

Any Internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers in this book are offered as a resource. They are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement by Zondervan, nor does Zondervan vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Published in association with the literary agency of Wolgemuth & Associates, Inc.

Cover design: Julie Calareso

Interior design: Kait Lamphere

Interior art: Julie Calareso, Scott Bajgrowicz

Printed in the United States of America

16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 /DHV/ 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	11
Introduction: Ready or Not, You're a Pastor	13
1. The Worship Pastor as <i>Church Lover</i>	21
2. The Worship Pastor as <i>Corporate Mystic</i>	29
3. The Worship Pastor as <i>Doxological Philosopher</i>	40
4. The Worship Pastor as <i>Disciple Maker</i>	51
5. The Worship Pastor as <i>Prayer Leader</i>	59
6. The Worship Pastor as <i>Theological Dietician</i>	68
7. The Worship Pastor as <i>War General</i>	79
8. The Worship Pastor as <i>Watchful Prophet</i>	87
9. The Worship Pastor as <i>Missionary</i>	97
10. The Worship Pastor as <i>Artist Chaplain</i>	110
11. The Worship Pastor as <i>Caregiver</i>	122
12. The Worship Pastor as <i>Mortician</i>	133
13. The Worship Pastor as <i>Emotional Shepherd</i>	143
14. The Worship Pastor as <i>Liturgical Architect</i>	156
15. The Worship Pastor as <i>Curator</i>	173
16. The Worship Pastor as <i>Tour Guide</i>	183
Conclusion: The Worship Pastor as <i>Failure</i>	193
 <i>Scripture Index</i>	 199
<i>Subject Index</i>	201

Introduction

READY OR NOT, YOU'RE A PASTOR

What the church needs most is not another hymnal, larger choirs, more technology, a revised prayer book, or another set of published scripts. What the church needs most is discerning, prayerful, joyous people who treat their work as worship planners and leaders as a holy, pastoral calling.

—John Witvliet, 2003¹

Dear Worship Leader:

You have an extraordinary job with high stakes and grand opportunities. You aren't *just* a song leader. You aren't *just* a lead musician. Your set lists aren't *just* inspiring medleys of well-glued songs. You aren't merely on a stage, and those people out there aren't merely the audience. They are Christ's bride, God's beloved, gathered in from the four corners of the world that they might be reclaimed by and reaimed toward the Author and Perfector of their faith. They are disciples, followers. What you do and how you lead have a direct and formative impact on their journey of faith. Whether you know it or not, you are *pastoring* them.

Each and every week, you are helping people answer the question, How do I approach God? Every worship service consistently shapes the faith of God's people by training them on what relating to God looks like. And faith shaping is pastoral work. Ready or not, you're a pastor.

Each and every week, you put words into people's mouths that become the language they will use to relate to God the other six days of the week. We wish people were regularly reading their Bibles and consistently engaging in life-on-life community, but if we're honest, many aren't. The only way many learn how to talk to God is through the words, lyrics, and prayers of the services you lead. Those things all

1. John Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003), 248.

come together as the corporate prayers of your church that week, teaching the people how to express their private prayers. Prayer shaping is pastoral work. Ready or not, you're a pastor.

Each and every week, you shape the beliefs of the people who gather. Your songs and words don't just inspire. They teach. They help people answer their basic questions: Who is God? What is He like? Who am I? How do I look at this world? Your words and songs shape people's theology, and that kind of teaching is pastoral work. Ready or not, you're a pastor.

Each and every week, you are informing people's knowledge of what mediation between God and humanity looks like. You are answering for God's people a fundamental human question: How am I ushered into God's presence rightly?² Your actions and leadership (not merely your songs) answer this. Who ushers people into God's presence? Who makes their worship acceptable? Is it you, or is it Jesus by the Holy Spirit? Worship Leader, do your prayers, countenance, leadership, and song selection point people to the one Mediator between God and humanity? You see, a pastor's principal job is to point people to Jesus. Ready or not, you're a pastor.

Each and every week, you are looked up to as an example and a leader. You have a sphere of immediate influence. Because you stand in front of people and lead them in God's holy worship, you are given the status of leader. Most disciples of Christ look to mentors and leaders to lead them and help them grow. Because you are regularly up front, you are one of those people. Ready or not, you're a pastor.

If you feel underequipped and unqualified, don't take these feelings as a sign you're not called. God is in the business of pouring Himself out through weak vessels (2 Cor. 4:7), and He will give you grace for the journey. But please don't waffle any longer in the untruth that the pastoral work is all being done by the individuals with "pastor" in their title. You may not have that heading on your business card or online profile, but that doesn't change the fact that your work is inherently pastoral. You are a pastor.

My hunch is that this is surprising news to a lot of us. It was to me. When I began to see the ways that my weekly worship leadership impacted the faith journeys of the people I led, I was taken aback. I couldn't mess around anymore with my job. But before we unpack how worship leaders are pastors, we have to first ask one question: How did we get to the place where we worship leaders are surprised to hear that we are pastors?

2. This is the fundamental question that ignited the Protestant Reformation, probably more properly posed, How am I justified before God?

How Did We Get Here? (Historical Touchpoints)

Pastoring through worship leading is an ancient idea. The first human beings, Adam and Eve, were charged by God to be creation's worship pastors. Scholars have noted the intentional parallels between the creation account in Genesis and the descriptions of Israel's first formalized group of worship pastors, the priests. For instance, Adam's job description to work and keep the earth (Gen. 2:15) didn't use traditional farming language but terms used to describe the worship leading duties of the Levites in the sanctuary (Num. 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6). The garden itself was described in both its layout and contents to show a purposeful similarity to the tabernacle and the temple—it had an eastern entry (Gen. 3:24; Ezek. 43:4), jewels and gold (Gen. 2:12; Ex. 25:11), a central “tree” (Gen. 2:9; Ex. 25:31–40), angelic guardians (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 25:18–20), and Adam and Eve's “tunics” (Gen. 3:21; Ex. 28:41).³ In a sense, humanity's central task was to pastor all of creation's worship of God. The link between worship leading and pastoring is etched into the bedrock of creation.⁴

This inseparable relationship is fleshed out in Israel's formalized worship. The earliest records of the gathered worship of God's people show that God set aside a whole subset—the priests in the line of Levi—to oversee, administrate, and lead the worship of the people of God (Num. 3). And important for us in a day and age when *music* is (unfortunately) synonymous with *worship*,⁵ we notice that, especially in David's time, music making and worship leading were consigned to the duties of priests (1 Chron. 6:31–48). There weren't priests *and* music leaders. The music leaders were priests (2 Chron. 5:11–13). In ancient Israel, leading worship (including music) was an extension of the duties of pastors.

In the New Testament era, the people of God experienced an overhaul in their theology of worship with the revelation of Jesus Christ. All the practices and duties of the past were now seen in light of His work, to such an extent that the book of Hebrews could call Him the “liturgist of the sanctuary,”⁶ the one, true Worship Leader who alone is worthy to usher us into God's presence (Heb. 7:24–25; 8:2; 9:11–14). The New Testament church saw in Christ the embodiment and pinnacle of how worship leading is bound up in priestly and pastoral roles.

3. See Gordon Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399–404.

4. Notice, too, that it doesn't take long in Genesis before music making is mentioned with Jubal, “the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe” (Gen. 4:21 ESV). We can already observe the forming of links between pastoring, worship leading, and music.

5. Throughout this section, I will be overemphasizing music in worship leading simply because it is the water we now swim in, and I therefore want to belabor how music leading was a pastoral function for much of the history of the church.

6. In the Greek, *tōn hagiōn leiturgos*.

The unbroken lineage of our heritage of worship pastoring carried forward through the early and medieval church. Their liturgies (the earliest of which included music) were led by the priest-pastors.⁷ When music developed in the church to higher levels of sophistication, just as with ancient Israel under David, priests didn't farm out musical worship to nonpastors. The church's, in fact, the Western world's, first composers, choirs, and song leaders were monks and priests. Artists were raised up from within the pastorate.⁸

Throughout the Middle Ages, we can see seeds sown which split the pastoral office from the song leader/musician. Music reached such a point of complexity with the dawn of polyphony and the advent of musical notation by the eleventh century that it became an art form to be more singularly studied and pursued, which in a sense professionalized it. In and of itself, this shift wasn't bad. It was necessary for the flourishing of the art. But with the idea of the professional musician came the notion of a nonpastoral musical figure. Musicians could conceive of their vocation outside the call of the pastorate.⁹ The universities, rather than the monasteries, became the hubs of serious music making. Here we enter into the age of the church as patron to artists who composed music for liturgical texts and sacred assemblies (e.g., Gabrieli, Palestrina). Likewise, with the introduction and increasing use of the organ, church positions for choirmasters and organists emerged. These shifts introduced, or at least made more common, the idea of nonpastoral figures leading elements of worship.

If we fast-forward to the history of American evangelicalism, things look more familiar. We should pay special attention to the Second Great Awakening (1790–1840) with its westward-moving revivalism of raising tents and blazing souls. This era bequeathed to modern evangelicals a pragmatic philosophy of worship that helped not only to preserve but also to solidify the split between the pastor and the now largely musical worship leader.¹⁰ By and large, the job of the musi-

7. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 65–67; outlined in Tim Dowley, *Christian Music: A Global History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 51–52.

8. Because of the anonymity of monastic life, usually only the most famous figures, like Ambrose of Milan (c. 340–397) and Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), can be named as examples of musician-pastor figures in the church.

9. The problematic nature of this split of office between pastor and musician was felt, for instance, during the Reformation in England. While (for various reasons) church leaders were shrinking their music programs across the country, one set of Royal Injunctions for St. George's Chapel, Windsor (1550), sought to replace the more "professional artists" with sober-minded musician-priests who had "more regard to their virtue and learning than to excellency in music." See Peter Le Huray, *Music and the Reformation in England, 1549–1660* (New York: Oxford, 1967), 24.

10. From the Second Great Awakening on, the model that every church is marked by two leaders—a captivating preacher and an inspiring musician—has become commonplace. As one historian put it, "It was, of course, an old maxim that great preachers should keep great performers at their sides. Since the Second Great Awakening, musical performances by famous songbirds have been inseparable from the planning and orchestration of an American revival." Kate Bowler and Wen Reagan, "Bigger, Better, Louder: The Prosperity Gospel's Impact on Contemporary Christian Worship," *Religion and American*

cian in the revivalist scheme was to “warm up” the congregation for the stirring message. As this two-part liturgy, music then preaching, moved increasingly from the tent to the church, it gave credence to the idea that the church musician’s job was to prepare for rather than actually do pastoral work.

Meanwhile, evangelicals had so simplified historic Christian liturgies that there were virtually no other worship elements to be led by anyone, whether they were a pastor or not, besides music and the sermon. To put it in a simplistic way, pastoral work in worship not only wasn’t musical leadership, it was basically only preaching. This hurt the church in two ways. First, music leaders lost almost any sense that they were engaging in pastoral activity in their song leading. Second, pastors began believing that the only pastoral work to be done in a worship service was preaching. Both parties unwittingly participated in the erosion of the bedrock of worship leading as pastoral work.¹¹

So here we are. We are living in a time of Western evangelicalism when our default assumption is that every church has two key offices—a pastor and a rock star.¹² And the current scheme of worship leadership struggles to hang on to any conviction that the work of these offices is pastoral. Worship leaders are in desperate need of a new (old) model.

The Aim of This Book

The Worship Pastor is a call to worship leaders to look to the “ancient paths” (Jer. 6:16). But because I want this book to be truly productive and edifying, it’s not going to be a summons to return to antiquated forms and functions of worship leadership that can’t work in the twenty-first century. I hope to offer a vision for something accessible, tangible, inspiring, and, yes, practical.

Culture: A Journal of Interpretation 24, no. 2 (2014): 195. Example pairings across history: Dwight L. Moody and Ira Sankey; Billy Sunday and Homer Rodeheaver; Billy Graham and George Beverly Shea; Brian Houston and Darlene Zschech; Louie Giglio and Chris Tomlin.

11. In fairness, I should note one tradition stemming from revivalism that might protest my generalizations here with respect to the worship leader’s lack of pastoral awareness. From the late 1800s on, the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions championed an awareness among worship leaders that they perform a *very* pastoral function. It is often said by worship leaders in this tradition that they engage in the pastoral/priestly work of ushering people into the presence of God. Ironically, though, this is one pastoral responsibility (the duty of mediation between God and humanity) that is reserved for Jesus alone (1 Tim. 2:5). So, while among evangelicals our Pentecostal and charismatic brothers and sisters probably have a more developed sense of the pastoral nature of the worship leader’s vocation, I would humbly submit that it’s insufficiently developed if not misdirected. For more on this, see chapter 2, “The Worship Pastor as Corporate Mystic.”

12. I phrase it like this for rhetorical effect, but I want readers to be aware that this issue actually cuts across traditionalist and contemporary lines. Before the dawn of contemporary/modern worship, church musicians could very much be “rock stars.” The music may have been different, but the outlook was largely the same: the musicians’ job was to “wow” people with great, inspiring music, with very little sense of a pastoral call in their vocation.

Each chapter will describe the worship pastor through vignettes and metaphors of how we can (and do) engage our jobs pastorally. The goal of this book isn't to load you up with a whole new set of duties that you don't have time for. It's to offer a vision of how what you're already doing is pastoral work, with the hope that your pastoral call might be strengthened toward a more robust and intentional ministry.

The status quo is already being disrupted. Some of you reading this book share my biography. You are part of a new generation of worship leaders who are dissatisfied with the model of worship leading handed down to you. Many of you are perhaps the first generation to have grown up in the purely contemporary church of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. You're now coming of age and assuming positions of worship leadership in all kinds of churches, from urban church plants to suburban megachurches. You're old enough now to ask deep questions about your vocation, and you've been around the block long enough to know that church rock stardom has been weighed and found wanting. You are serious and sober, and you want to do it right.

At the same time, many churches, educational institutions, and resource hubs aren't equipped with all the tools to engage worship leading from a pastoral perspective in the twenty-first century. *The Worship Pastor* seeks to play a part in filling that void.

It should be noted that the book's title, *The Worship Pastor*, might be a bit misleading, as if a worship pastor is a special kind of office or call. The truth is that, while some like me are blessed to be able to specialize (I know that can be a dangerous word) in worship, I believe that every pastor should consider worship leadership part of their duty, and every worship leader should view their job as fulfilling a pastoral function. Every pastor and worship leader is a worship pastor. Clergy in some Christian traditions already have worship leading built into their job descriptions and training (e.g., Anglicans, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Eastern Orthodox).

The goal of this book is to encourage worship leaders, congregations, and their overseers to collectively up the ante on what a worship leader is. Therefore, I am speaking into the modern role of the worship leader that has emerged in recent years as a mission-critical position on church staffs, and I am pleading for us to give the worship leader's job far more weight than it is now typically given. So, though terms like *worship leader* and *worship pastor* are slippery, I choose to use them as the best touchpoints for the broadest possible connection with those who will read this book.¹³

13. My friend Mike Cospers says much the same thing about the liabilities of certain titles accompanying the reluctant necessity to use them. See *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2013), 21.

Who This Book Is For

This book is for worship leaders of all stripes. If you're a new worship leader, this book is for you. It will give you an inspiring vision for the road ahead. It will hopefully also provide a set of tools to help sharpen and aim your call. If you've been a worship leader for a while, *The Worship Pastor* is for you too. It will be a fresh articulation of the job you've already been doing and hopefully provide some inspiration for how to make what you do even better. So whether you're starting out or burning out or anywhere in between, there's something here for you.

This book is for pastors who want to take their oversight of worship seriously. It will be a tremendous aid to pastors for several reasons:

1. The pastor/worship leader relationship many times makes or breaks an effective ministry. Knowing your counterpart's role and call will help you both work better together.
2. If your pastoral training was like mine, chances are not much time was spent on worship. *The Worship Pastor* will not only flesh out a practical theology of worship leading, it will do so from a pastoral angle. It will speak your language.
3. This book will help you to take your call as a worship leader more seriously by giving you a tangible expression of pastoring through worship.

This book is for worship teams and volunteers. If you're in a church and care deeply about its worship, this book will energize you with a deep, inspiring vision about what you do. It will further guide you in how to make worship less of a show and more of a ministry. I'd even encourage teams to go through this book together.

This book is for colleges and seminaries. This book aims to fill a resource void in the curricula of worship programs in Christian colleges and seminaries. I am in touch with many overseers of worship departments who are eager to give up-and-coming worship leaders an inspiring, accessible, but thorough articulation of their pastoral call. It's my hope that God will use this book for that purpose and more.

This book is for a variety of Christian worship traditions. My hope is to be broad enough that the takeaways can be applied across most lines of Christian worship traditions, from free-church Pentecostal to prayer book liturgical. Whether your worship services are largely musical or based on many spoken words, free flowing or highly structured, *The Worship Pastor* should be able to relate to almost everything you do.

How to Read This Book

This book is meant to be flexible for different readers and circumstances. You can definitely read cover to cover. However, each chapter really can stand alone, and I invite you to peruse the chapter headings to see if any titles either pique some interest or expose some unexplored places. It may be that you're at a point in ministry where you want to shore up some weak spots or expand into new ministry territory. Go ahead and jump to those places.

The Worship Pastor also breaks up nicely into a roughly four-month study of a chapter per week. The chapters should be short enough to be doable for individuals, teams, or small groups, even those with busy schedules.

A Concluding Confession

A preacher and author I admire greatly, Steve Brown, once said in a sermon, “Christian authors should confess their sins in the first chapter of their book . . . and then I’ll hear what they have to say.”

Here’s one very deep and personal confession. As I’ve gathered the ideas for *The Worship Pastor*, and as I’ve sat down to write it, many moments of self-righteous pride have welled up within me about what a successful worship pastor I must be to “write the book.” I’ve been pretty impressed with myself at times, thinking (this is embarrassing to admit) that some of these chapters are nothing short of autobiographical sketches of my “ministry success.” So I confess that I’ve hopelessly spilled my sin and vanity onto every page of this book, and writing it makes me want to think far more highly of myself than I ought.

But to be honest, I don’t live up to what I write. In many ways these sketches are pictures of worship pastors I know whom I’m jealous that I’m not more like. So for my sake—and by God’s grace, for yours—please don’t miss the concluding chapter, “The Worship Pastor as Failure,” for that is what we are, and, as you’ll see, there’s great hope in that.

*Jesus, be our Worship Pastor, by the power of
Your Spirit, to the glory of the Father.*

THE WORSHIP PASTOR AS CHURCH LOVER

I love you dead. At this moment.

—Walker Percy, 1971¹

Without your wound where would your power be?

—Thornton Wilder, 1928²

The Rarest Church-Going Species in Modern Times

If you haven't grown up in the church, the picture I'm about to paint might look foreign, but bear with me. From before I can remember and until the day I went off to college, Waialae Baptist Church—a quaint, multicultural, evangelical gathering of the battle-worn faithful on the south side of a small Hawaiian island in the middle of the Pacific—was my church. My parents began attending there because of its vibrant worship, stirring preaching, and lively programs, but these features didn't last forever. Things happened: a minor scuffle, a major snafu, quick pastoral turnovers, cycles of financial glory and peril, and meaningful relationships occasionally torn apart—sometimes by death, sometimes by sin, always with pain. Newer, hipper churches started popping up around us, and the opportunity for my parents to abandon ship and start over seemed to be ever present.

It's only with hindsight that I can see how my parents' stubborn commitment to one church would become one of the greatest gifts they could have ever given me. I watched them serve faithfully as church members through budget crises,

1. Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins* (New York: Picador, 1971), 68.

2. Thornton Wilder, *The Angel That Troubled the Waters and Other Plays* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1928), 106.

leadership conflicts, numerical growth and decline, building campaigns, mission trips, scandals, worship wars, personal attacks, and even their own son's teenage ecclesiastical wanderlust.

In an age where churches are dumped faster than middle school boyfriends, where flocks are sized up, examined, sampled, consumed, and discarded like the latest health food fad, those who commit to sticking it out with a church are becoming an endangered species. But even in times when such rare breeds were perhaps more plentiful, they were a sight to behold. The people of a bygone era once called these fanciful creatures "churchmen." For every worship leader who desires to see their job in a more pastoral light, I invite you to look with me at the churchman as a model for what loving the church can look like.

The Churchman as Church *Lover*

For several understandable reasons, *churchman* seems like a stuffy, antiquated title best left for scrapbooks and grandma's stories of the old days. First, it sounds like the worst kind of cheesy Christian nostalgia out there, on par with the sappy, waltzy, "oohm-pa-pa" hymns of the 1940s. Second, what about the church-*woman*? I encourage you that there just might be more than a kernel of timeless worth underneath this dusty, dry husk, from which both men and women who lead worship can benefit. But to avoid the PTSD some of us associate with tweed suits and warbly vibratoed hymn singing, we'll call this model the "church lover." Hopefully our examination of six characteristics of the church lover will spark a passion to cultivate these qualities in our own lives.

1. *A church lover passionately loves and believes in the church.* We've all seen it—that paradoxical "love is blind" relationship. The gorgeous bombshell marries the mayor of Nerdville. "What does she see in him?" we ask. "He must have a lot of money," or, "He's probably got a great personality," we say. As odd as these kinds of relationships appear, I'd submit that a simple love between a worship leader and his or her church looks a lot like this.

A worship leader who has a pastoral heart believes with desperate optimism in the church and her work in the world. As Bill Hybels has said in many places, "The local church is the hope of the world," and a worship pastor passionately believes this and loves their church for it. The local church is the hope of the world because the church is the body *of Christ*, and *Christ* is the true hope of the world. Because the Father has put all His eggs in the Son's basket, God has bet all-in on His Son's body and bride. God so delights in His people that He feels quite comfortable throwing explanation to the wind in His declaration that amounts to, "I love her because I love her" (see Deut.

7:7–8).³ A worship pastor seeks to revel in this kind of affection, which lavishes grace on the ungraceful and love on the unlovable. Pastorally minded worship leaders attempt to grow in this “I love her warts and all” disposition exactly because it is God’s disposition.

2. *A church lover zealously commits to the church’s vision and mission.* What often distinguishes worship leaders from worship pastors is the latter’s ability to place their role and work within the broader vision and mission of the local church. A church I once served had this mission: “to declare and demonstrate the liberating power of the gospel.” I needed to be able to conceive of how my work in planning and leading worship services facilitated and participated in that mission. In an annual planning document submitted to my elders, I fleshed it out this way:

The worship service is the church’s “ground zero” for declaring and demonstrating the liberating power of the gospel. Because all fuel for ministry and mission is to be found in the gospel, and because the gospel is something ordained by God to be preached, heard, and received first and foremost in the worship service, our worship therefore becomes the nucleus of our vision. It is where the declaration from God, “It is finished,” is most clearly heard, relieving burdens so that disciples are formed and freed to demonstrate and witness this life-changing work to others.

Most church vision or mission statements connect in some way, shape, or form with the Great Commission’s call to “make disciples” (Matt. 28:18–20). A worship pastor is acutely aware of worship’s role in the disciple-making process and should be able to articulate to the other church leaders and to the rest of the church body just how worship comes together with the church’s vision.⁴

3. *A church lover humbly submits to a church’s God-ordained leadership.* I firmly believe that the pastor/worship leader relationship is the most vulnerable relationship in the entire church. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve witnessed and heard of conflicts between pastors and their worship leaders, and I can’t tell you how many of those instances ended up leaving a mortal wound in the precious heart of a church. Over the years, I’ve found this axiom to be nearly unassailable: When my relationship with the lead pastor is solid, I can weather just about any

3. In a local church I once served, Rev. Dr. Marty Martin was famous for declaring to God’s people at the table during Communion, “He loves you, because He loves you, because He loves you.” What appears to be circular reasoning might just be the deepest, most eternal theological insight anyone could ever explore (Rom. 11:33–36).

4. For more on worship’s role in the discipleship process, see chapter 4, “The Worship Pastor as Disciple Maker.”

storm; when my relationship with the lead pastor is shaky, absolutely everything else feels destabilized.

We could go round and round about why pastors and worship leaders struggle to get along (left brain vs. right brain, engineer vs. artist, envy of gifts you don't have, etc.), but it no doubt gets close to the heart of the matter to simply say that a pastorally oriented worship leader should be very aware of God's choice of *ordained* leadership in a church. Regardless of your church's system for choosing and recognizing their pastor's leadership role, I am using the word *ordained* in a broad sense. I simply mean that every leader (or group of leaders) in a true church has been placed there by God, ordained by His sovereignty to be in that position. Most worship leaders in churches, however pastorally oriented they may be, *aren't* in that unique position.⁵

A worship leader who understands the pastoral calling (in both their life and the life of their other pastor[s]) takes seriously Scripture's encouragement that members of Christ's body should submit to one another in general (Eph. 5:21) and submit to their leadership in particular (Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12–13; 1 Tim. 5:17). What does this look like on the ground? For me, it looks like building up a strong relationship of trust between my pastor and me through my faithful, easy, joyful following of their directions and, yes, orders. It means selectively choosing moments to voice disagreements and seeking to do so in gentleness and humility, and *even then* being willing to receive their no. Worship leaders like us need to think long and hard about what hills are truly worth dying on. The longer I do this, the more I find that far fewer of those hills dot the landscape of ministry than I had previously thought.⁶

4. *A church lover joyfully cultivates compassion for everyone in their flock, not a select few.* Just as I can't selectively love only my wife's eyes, hands, lips, and right pinky toe, so a worship pastor can't cultivate affection for a part of Christ's bride. We are called to love her wholly and completely. We worship leaders get into trouble when we start unknowingly developing rock-star-like entourages and cliques around us, complete with inside jokes and us-and-them behavior.

When Jesus gathered people to Himself, He cultivated a community that had discernible boundaries and was incredibly porous. He allowed for two-way traffic and seemed to be perpetually disrupting the status quo when the community was

5. It might be worth remembering here that some traditions—ranging from Eastern Orthodox to Anglican to certain Reformed and Presbyterian bodies—in their various formularies and constituting documents, actually name their ordained clergy as principal leaders in worship. Once again, as we saw in the introduction, not every stream of Christianity can make sense of how starkly we've divided the "offices" of pastor and worship leader.

6. To explore the dynamic between pastor and worship leader further, I recommend Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2008), 241–48; Andi Rozier, "The Worship Leader and His Pastor," in *Doxology and Theology: How the Gospel Forms the Worship Leader*, ed. Matt Boswell (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2013), 161–72.

either too undefined⁷ or too cliquish.⁸ Similarly, when Christ is our center and the gospel's aroma of grace is wafting around, we worship leaders will notice a similar dynamic at play, which we happily encourage. A worship leader who deeply loves the church encourages and fosters relationships both inside and outside official times and places, and she constantly has her eye out to introduce new people into the "system," disrupting its tendency toward ingrown-ness.

A pastorally minded worship leader also shares God's heart for the forgotten who often reside on the margins of church (and worship) life—the unattractive, the mentally and physically disabled, the poor and homeless, and children. We see how much God cares for the marginalized in His scathing critique of Israel's hypocritically tidy worship practices alongside blatant injustices (Amos 5).⁹

5. *A church lover willingly enters into their church's wounded and wounding nature.* As worship leaders, we are ever tempted to wander into the temporary comforts of bitterness to cope with the perpetual pain the church inflicts on us. The criticisms are endless—from sound levels to song selection, from intolerable theology to inappropriate outfits. Our church is always wounding us.

Many a wise counselor has said, "Hurt people hurt people." The difference between a worship leader and a worship pastor is in the ability to recognize that others' propensity to wound is a symptom of being wounded. A pastoral heart builds up such a love and empathy for the church that, even in the midst of receiving wounds, he or she is able to respond in love by drawing near instead of retreating or fighting in defensiveness. How is this possible?

Insightful Catholic writer Henri Nouwen points us to a ministry model (patterned after Jesus) that he calls "The Wounded Healer." Nouwen describes our own woundedness as the very point of entry for ministry to other wounded souls. Our woundedness "is healing because it takes away the false illusion that wholeness can be given by one to another. It is healing because it does not take away the loneliness and pain of another, but invites him to recognize his loneliness on a level where it can be shared."¹⁰

At a church I once served, a woman wrote our elder board, criticizing my sloppy attire during an important churchwide meeting after a service. (I had untucked my shirt when the service was over.) She claimed it was just one in a series of instances that displayed my irreverent attitude toward the church, going so far as to claim

7. Think of Jesus' tear-filled boundary marking with the Pharisees (Matt. 23).

8. Think of His welcoming of prostitutes (Luke 7:36–50), adulterers (John 4:1–26), "social sinners" (Matt. 9:9–13; Luke 19:1–10), and children (Luke 18:15–17) when the community was trying to push them out.

9. Read more on this aspect of the worship pastor's call in chapter 8, "The Worship Pastor as Watchful Prophet."

10. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 92.

that such immature behavior was unbecoming of a minister. She requested that the elders put me under some kind of probationary discipline. Some of you are the type who can blow off such seeming absurdity with an eye roll or a shrug. Not me. To me, it struck at the heart of my vocation. It inflicted a deep wound.

I wanted to lash out. I wanted to put this woman in her place. I wanted to marshal ten billion airtight biblical arguments why God doesn't give one whip about my untucked shirt but cares greatly when false accusations are lodged against one of His beloved, ordained leaders. I was hell-bent on justifying myself. In that moment of panic, when I was on the brink of unleashing a disaster, a wise colleague and seasoned pastor gave me insight into that woman's past. She had grown up physically, emotionally, and spiritually abused by her father, a fundamentalist pastor. In a moment like this, it is amazing how knowledge of another's deep wounds transforms the way you feel and respond to the very wounds they've inflicted on you. It opened me up to hear this woman, to connect, to lean in, and to minister. Strangely, the way she hurt me became a portal of understanding the pain she had felt for so many years. The wounds that the church inflicts on you can become the very vehicle for your ministry to her woundedness. A pastorally oriented worship leader embraces this counterintuitive dynamic out of raw, Spirit-borne, gospel-rooted love for the church.

6. A church lover faithfully reminds the church of her church-ness. Part of loving the church well is reminding her that she is a community. In our day and age, when worship has become such a subjective experience, the church is ever prone to hyperindividualizing our faith and practice. We see this very tangibly in worship services in which we're all explicitly or implicitly encouraged to have our own private encounters with God. Sometimes we can get the impression that the most meaningful worship service looks like one in which each worshiper is having their own private devotional experience with God . . . and they just all happen to be in the same room! But as a pastor I once knew liked to say, "In worship, it's not 'Jesus and me' but 'Jesus and *we*.'"¹¹

The worship pastor can remind the church of her communal nature in several ways. One of the things I like to do is balance the amount of time given to "eyes open" and "eyes closed" in my own leading of the sung portion of a worship service. I make it a point to peel open my privatized experience and look around at the saints as we sing together, as a visual demonstration to say, "Hey, church, we are all encountering God *together*."¹²

11. "Public worship is not private devotion, and ministers and musicians have to be clear that encouraging this kind of individualism is the enemy of corporate liturgy and community singing" (John L. Bell, *The Singing Thing: A Case for Congregational Song* [Chicago: GIA, 2000], 129).

12. Read more about leading people in the *communal* (rather than individual) experience of the presence of God in chapter 2, "The Worship Pastor as Corporate Mystic."

Another thing to think through is your community's range of physical expression. Every church is different, but there tends to be an unspoken spectrum of propriety when it comes to how physically demonstrative people are in worship. The difficulty arises when individuals stick out too far beyond the community's unspoken boundaries. From time to time I've had to approach worshipers individually who were so beyond that boundary that they were becoming a distraction to the people around them. It's my belief that we should encourage full-bodied physicality in worship and that we should stretch our congregations to increase those expressive boundaries over time. Still, a pastor will detect that worship's communal nature is in jeopardy when people are (I believe selfishly) insisting that their expressive freedom in worship trumps others' discomfort around them. Loving the church *as the church* means a willingness to step into these difficult and sensitive issues with love, grace, and a valuing of the whole body.¹³

Loving the Church by Rising to Your Call

I remember a defining moment in my new pastoral ministry years ago. A gentleman in his late sixties was dealing with his aging, dying mother and asking serious spiritual and ethical questions about whether to pull her off life support. When he called, you could tell he was in a crisis, feeling the burden of making a decision that, either way, would leave him with guilt and regret. He called me because he viewed me as a pastor.

I remember all the thoughts that went through my head for the first ten minutes of the phone call as he poured out his soul to me: Why in the world is he asking me for advice? What could I possibly offer a man nearly three times my age dealing with a problem with his mom, who was nearly four times my age? It all seemed pretty absurd to me. But before I said anything harmful, the Holy Spirit intervened and gave me a talking-to that has changed the way I've viewed my role ever since.

The Spirit's gentle lesson went something like this: "Hey, Zac: It would be extremely selfish of you and the worst kind of self-righteous, false humility to hide behind your age and inexperience and tell this man that you have nothing to offer him. You represent *Me*. Who you are in this moment is way more about

13. I would humbly challenge many of my charismatic brothers and sisters here, who would probably point out that stifling one's individual expression is stifling the freedom of the Holy Spirit within. Not discounting this reality, I think we need to ride this tension with prayer and pastoral sensitivity. We also need to remember that the Holy Spirit, who comes to us individually and personally, saves us *into* Christ's church *corporately and communally*. The same "wind of God" who prompts and moves us spontaneously (John 3:8) is the Spirit of *unity* who brings Christ's church *together*, working in us corporately (Eph. 4:1–6).

My call and My conferring of a role on you than your age, experience, and ‘wisdom.’ The most loving thing, for My sake and for the sake of the church I’ve called you to, is to rise to the call of your office and assume all the authority that this man is seeking from you. Besides, he’s really seeking Me, not you. Who you are and what you’re doing is way more about My call than your credentials. Speak for Me now, and comfort this man. Love My church.”

The call to love Christ’s church is no easy thing. But it is a must for the worship pastor. Just as we observed in the introduction, as you plan and lead worship services week in and week out, you are pastoring people whether you know it or not, and people are conferring on you a certain pastoral authority whether *they* know it or not. Loving the church well means a willingness to assume this office. But we assume it much more like a piece of clothing than a part of our identity. This pastoral call comes to us as a gift, from the Spirit, to be opened and worn. People who see this garment on you will seek you out and expect things of you even when you’re not ready, even when you feel you haven’t earned the right. Rise up in faith, brothers and sisters, because the same God who called you child even while you were an enemy (Rom. 5:10) is the Spirit who calls you pastor even while you’re woefully underqualified.

“Worship pastor, do you love me?” Jesus asks.

“Yes, Lord, You know that I love You,” we reply.

“Feed my lambs.”¹⁴

Tender Father, help us to love Your church.

14. Cf. John 21:15–19.