

Worship Matters Video Intensive with Bob Kauflin
Session 7: Effects of Leading: Gospel Community
(From Chapters 14-15 of *Worship Matters*)¹
Transcript

Welcome to Session 7 of the Worship Matters Video Intensive. We've been looking at the task of the congregational worship leader, which is to "*magnify the greatness of God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit, skillfully combining God's word with music*" but for what purpose? To what end? What's the result of what we're doing supposed to be? What does a successful leading look like?

I know for some of us, a successful leading is just getting to the end of the meeting without a train wreck; remembering all the words, making sure the capo is in the right place before each song, avoiding awkward silences.

But God has higher aims for us than those. If we're faithfully sowing God's greatness in Jesus in people's hearts it's going to make a difference in their lives. It's going to change the way they live.

Here's what we're seeking to do as we lead our churches: *Motivate the gathered church to proclaim the gospel, to cherish God's presence, and to live for God's glory.*

Now in this session, we're just going to focus on that first part, *Motivating the gathered church to proclaim the gospel.*"

I. Motivating the Wrong Way

Now, when you're in front of people, leading them in corporate worship and they're not responding, you want to motivate them to do something. You want to motivate them to change. Unfortunately, we can be motivated to try and help people in a number of unbiblical and unhelpful ways, and I've tried them all.

A. We can demand they respond

Like the time I was leading a youth group at my church. We were in the middle of singing and a lot of the guys, especially in the back had their hands in their pockets, just kind of not paying attention. So, in the middle of the song, I just stopped and I said something like, "You guys have no idea who it is you're worshipping. This is the God of the universe, the God who created you, and you're just standing there with your hands in your pockets. Do you think that pleases him? Alright, let's go back to singing."

As you might expect, it wasn't exactly the most motivating speech I'd ever given in my life. None of them were certainly motivated to worship God, although I was motivated later to ask their forgiveness and their parents' forgiveness, which is the appropriate thing to do.

B. We can try to manipulate them into responding

You know, musical modulations are used sometimes for that purpose. Sometimes we'll say things like, "Come on! Let's sing it!" like people aren't already singing. We can feign emotion at times and use what I call the "worship leader voice." You know, it's this breathy voice where you just want people to think God's really here now because you're talking in a breathy voice. That's really manipulation and we can talk with our normal voices when we're leading people.

C. We can project guilt to make them respond

i.e. Telling them that they're not doing enough, or they're not singing loud enough, they're not trying hard enough. I remember I was at a conference years ago and one night we had had a meeting and the next morning we gathered and the leader of the conference addressed us at the start and said, "You know...last night, we had a window opened to us from heaven. It was open. And we didn't go through it." And I thought to myself, "How is that supposed to encourage me?" You know, we had this opportunity last night, we missed it, and so just try harder this morning. That is projecting guilt on the people you're leading.

II. Motivating the Right Way

We don't want to do any of those things. When we're leading people, we want to motivate them by grace and three of the ways we can do that are through our *example*, our *exhortations*, and our *encouragement*.

A. Through our example

When we're leading we shouldn't have to choose between leading people and worshiping God. We lead people *through* worshiping God. Psalm 34:5 says,

"Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces are never ashamed."
- Psalm 34:5²

When we're thinking about how we look, trying to remember the lyrics, wondering why the drummer's slowing down, or cringing at how out of tune that last harmony was, that's going to show on our face and not be very motivating to our people.

That's why, if you're an instrumentalist, I always encourage you to sing while you're playing. If you're just getting into your instrument, people have the tendency to think, "Well, they're into their music." If you sing, it's going to remind people of what is most important and it's going to help you adjust what you're playing to actually support the lyrics.

And if you wonder what kind of example you are to the congregation I'd encourage you to video yourself and to watch it. It can be painful, but just remember that's what your congregation is seeing every week.

B. Through our exhortations

i.e. Clear, grace-filled exhortations, connecting thoughts for people, explaining what's going on, answering questions like, "Why is this true? What difference does it make? What's not being said here? Why does this line follow the last one?"

Now, I know there are differences of opinion as to how much a leader should say and here's what my counsel would be: a leader should say what's necessary to make things clearer or more relevant without being distracting. If you wonder if you're doing that, just ask your spouse or a good friend if you tend to say the same things, if you're unclear, or if you have any irritating quirks, as we all do.

Over the years I've found you can say something between the sung phrases of a song that connect the church more with what we're singing. We can just sing the songs as written, but, often times, just inserting a phrase, whether it's said or sung, can help people grasp the reality of what we're singing. Not every song, not every break. You can actually practice this at home, you can listen to a recording and just interject lines, not just repeating the lines (although that's okay), but adding to what's being sung, expanding on it. Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. Say we're singing the song, "Be Thou My Vision". The third verse goes like this:

(♪Sings)
Riches I heed not nor man's empty praise
Now mine inheritance now and always³

Now we can just sing it like that, or I can insert a thought in the middle of those two lines:

(♪Sings)
Riches I heed not nor man's empty
 (Yours is the only praise that matters)
Now mine inheritance now and always

I'm just trying to help people think more about what we're singing. Now, notice I didn't say the last word of that line so that I could fit in what I wanted to say. I just found over the years that if I wait until the line is sung, then trying to squeeze something in can often be rushed and people don't even know what I'm saying.

Another example would be "How Great Is Our God".⁴ So we're singing that chorus, "How great is our God, Sing with me, how great is our God," you know, a lot of times that's what gets repeated, we sing that over and over. Well, why not remind people of why our God is so great?

*How great is our God (You rule the nations!)
How great is our God (You redeemed us!)*

Remind people of why we're singing those lines, how great is our God!

So, that's the idea. Now don't overdo this because it can be irritating. I've done it. I've listened back to recordings of myself and thought, "Why are you always saying stuff?" But at the right moment, at the right time, Spirit-led, as you're engaging with the song, it can be a real encouragement to the people you're leading. Which leads to the next way we can motivate people and that is just encouragement.

C. Through our encouragement

We can remind people that no matter where they are in their walk with God, in their circumstances, in their thinking, God is at work and he has already done the most amazing thing to prove his love for them and that is to give his son, Jesus Christ for their sins on the cross. We want to point people to God's promises which are all "Yes" and "Amen" in Christ Jesus. We want to impart grace and faith to them. They're struggling. They're challenged. They're burdened. We want to remind them of truths like we find in Romans 8:29-30. Listen to this:

"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, (It's a sure thing. We're going to become like Jesus.) in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." - Romans 8:29-30

God has a plan for every Christian to conform them to the image of Christ and that plan cannot be thwarted. So, we want to be ready to impart grace and faith to people as they come in with their burdens and challenges and remind them of all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

III. Building a Worshiping Community

Now, this motivation has an end: it's to build up and strengthen the church. We're building a worshiping community. It's like what we read about in 1 Peter 2:4-5. This is what's taking place for those whom God has redeemed:

"As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." - 1 Peter 2:4-5

As we lead people each Sunday, by the grace of God, we are building a worshiping community for the glory of God. We're not just attracting a crowd. We're not just a random group of individuals who happened to show up on

Sunday morning. This isn't a convention, it's not a conference, it's not a concert. It's the church of the living God, redeemed through the gospel of Jesus Christ, indwelt by the Spirit of God. It's an amazing event. It's an amazing activity. Paul says in Ephesians 2:22 that we are "*being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*" - Ephesians 2:22

We are part of God's plan throughout history to have a people for himself who will display his glory and proclaim his wondrous works, his excellencies to a lost and dying world. And that's what Peter goes on to say in verse 9 of chapter 2:

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." - 1 Peter 2:9

IV. Proclaiming the Gospel

And the first excellency that we are called to proclaim is the mercy that God has shown us in Jesus Christ. We are motivating people through our encouragement, our example, our exhortations to proclaim the gospel.

Now people come into our meetings proclaiming all kinds of things. Things like:

*God can't forgive what I've done.
I'm important and you're not.
My problems are bigger than God.
I don't have any friends.
My cancer has turned my life into a nightmare.
Happiness comes through having as much stuff as I can.*

Our hearts are proclaiming all these things and more and we want to give them something else to proclaim: the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light and we do that by reminding them of what Jesus did 2000 years ago and how it affects whatever it is they're going through right now.

Now to do that, we need to know these things ourselves. I had been a Christian almost 30 years before I realized the difference between *talking* about a gospel-centered life and actually *living* in the good of a gospel-centered life.

So, one of the most important things you can do as a leader is to preach the gospel to yourself every day. And there have been a number of books, after Scripture, that have helped me in this process. Books like:

The Gospel for Real Life by Jerry Bridges
Living the The Cross Centered Life by C.J. Mahaney
And a short book that is really excellent in terms of applying the gospel is *The Gospel Primer* by Milton Vincent.
And of course if you really want to be challenged, there's a book by John Stott called, *The Cross of Christ*, which will steep your soul, which will enable you to

meditate deeply on why the cross, why the gospel of Jesus Christ is so relevant to our lives.

V. How the Gospel Helps Us

As we become more convinced of how what Jesus did through his life, death, and resurrection is relevant to our lives, we'll want others to live in the good of that. We do that by making connections. Here's some of the connections we can make for people:

A. People struggling with condemnation and guilt

God's word tells us in Romans 8:1,

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
- Romans 8:1

And that's why we'll sing a song like this:

(♪Sings)

When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within

(There's plenty of guilt there)

Upward I look and see him there who made an end of all my sin

(How did he do that?)

Because the sinless Savior died my sinful soul is counted free

(How did that happen?)

For God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me

To look on him and pardon me⁵

What a truth! What a reality that can free people from the idea that they are living under God's condemnation.

Or how about this one? This hymn:

(♪Sings)

No condemnation now I dread

Jesus and all in him is mine⁶

You know, sometimes we sing through those words and we just think, I'm just singing an old hymn. NO! You're singing truth that can lift the burden of condemnation from people's lives. We want to help them see that. Don't assume just because people are singing lyrics that they are making the connections in their minds. We want to do everything we can to help people understand it's not only knowing the truth that matters, it's seeing how it connects to our lives. But if we don't see how it matters, then we are not going to be very effective at helping others!

B. Insecurity in God's love now and in the future

Another area that people can struggle with is insecurity in God's love both now and in the future. We want to remind them of what Paul said in Romans 8:37-39:

"I am sure (I am sure) that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, (that pretty much covers it) will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." - Romans 8:37-39

So we sing, *"Not death nor life nor anything can ever separate me, O love that will not let me go, yes I am his forever."*

It's a Sovereign Grace song called, "His Forever," taken from an old hymn.

(♪Sings)
Not death nor life nor anything can ever separate me
O love that will not let me go, yes, I am his forever⁷

Again, we're not just singing words, we're not just making noise, we are proclaiming the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

C. Broken relationships and bitterness

Another area that people struggle with: broken relationships and bitterness. And we read in Colossians 3:12-13:

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." - Colossians 3:12-13

There is a connection between the fact that we have been forgiven and our ability to forgive others. So, we sing songs like this. This is from verse 3 of "All I Have is Christ":

(♪Sings)
Now Lord I would be yours alone and live so all might see
The strength to follow your commands could never come from me
O Father use my ransomed life in any way you choose
And let my song forever be my only boast is you⁸

It reminds us that we've been ransomed and that our lives have been redeemed for the glory of Christ. And if we've been forgiven, then certainly we can forgive others.

D. Indwelling sin

Another area that everyone battles is indwelling sin—the power of sin, that constant war against sin that takes place in our hearts daily, minute-by-minute. We want to remind people of verses like Galatians 5:24:

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” - Galatians 5:24

So we sing a song like this. This is "Grace Unmeasured." Part of it goes like this:

*(♪Sings)
Grace unmeasured, strong and true,
That makes me long to be like you
That turns me from my selfish pride
To love the cross on which you died⁹*

It's what the gospel does. It turns us from our selfish pride to boast in the cross. It turns us from our selfish pride so that we might flee sin, so that we might fight it, so that we might turn from it and live for the glory of Jesus Christ.

E. Fear of death

One more area that people struggle with and that is just a fear of death. People are afraid to die because they've forgotten what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:54-55:

“When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’” - 1 Corinthians 15:54-55

So we sing, *"No guilt in life, no fear in death this is the power of Christ in me. From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny!"* Oh, that's so rich, and it can free people from the fear of death.

VI. Telling of His Salvation

So, I hope you can see that on Sundays, we're not just gathering to "worship;" we're not just gathering to sing songs, just doing what we do every week because that's what Christians do. We're gathering to do what Psalm 96:2 says,

“Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.” - Psalm 96:2

We're *telling of his salvation*, and because we're so prone to wander, we're so prone to forget what we've been told, it helps if as leaders, we proclaim the excellencies in three ways: *clear, consistent, and compelling*.

A. Clear

Making the gospel clear means taking time to explain what Jesus did, what it accomplished, and what difference it makes. He actually took our place on the cross, he actually endured God's wrath for us, he endured the fullness of God's punishment, against our sins. There's no more left to be poured out on us. That is such freeing news! Jesus Christ took our punishment, bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we could be forgiven, reconciled, restored, and redeemed and what a glorious gospel that is!

So that means we don't sing general songs about God that could just as easily be sung by Buddhists or Muslims. We don't sing songs that make vague, obscure references to the cross. We don't assume everyone knows what this gospel we're singing about means. We want to be clear about Jesus and what he accomplished, like these words:

"The sin of man and wrath of God have been on Jesus laid"

"Now my debt is paid It is paid in full"

That's clear! That tells us what happened at the cross.

B. Consistent

We also want to be consistent in our proclamation because our tendency is to drift into self-atonement, self-justification, and self-effort. Every week, every day, practically every minute we go through the same temptation of thinking we don't really need a savior or that Jesus couldn't possibly forgive us and every Sunday we have the opportunity to remind people that every sin merits God's eternal condemnation, but Jesus drank that cup of wrath bone dry for everyone who trusts in him. We want to be consistent in proclaiming those things.

C. Compelling

And finally, we want to be compelling. We want to proclaim the good news of the gospel in a compelling way so that people see our joy, our amazement, so that they can observe our holiness, the fact that we are affected by these things. One of the most important aspects of biblical worship we desperately need to recover is a passionate, scripturally-informed exaltation of Jesus Christ and his redeeming work on the cross and as we give ourselves to that priority, both privately and publically, the people we lead in our meetings will be proclaiming much better and truer things as they leave our meetings than when they walked in.

In the next session we'll look at two more ways our congregational worship is meant to affect those we lead.

Session 7 Discussion Questions:

1. In the recent past, what would a successful meeting look like in your mind?

2. Describe your experience with leading people while trying to worship God. What should the relationship between the two look like?

3. What false things are our hearts proclaiming as we come into church?

4. What are ways you can proclaim the gospel to yourself prior to Sunday service?

5. How can you proclaim the gospel more clearly and personally to your church as you lead them in singing?

6. **GROUP EXERCISE:** Provide a Scripture verse, a song, and a 1-2 sentence exhortation that connects the gospel to each of the following human struggles:
 - a. Struggling with condemnation/guilt
 - b. Insecurity in God's love now and in the future
 - c. Broken relationships and bitterness
 - d. Indwelling sin
 - e. Fear of death

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⁴ "How Great Is Our God" by Chris Tomlin, Ed Cash, Jesse Reeves © 2004 sixsteps Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing), worshiptogether.com songs (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing), Wondrously Made Songs (Admin. by Music Services, Inc.)

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⁶ "And Can It Be" by Charles Wesley, *Psalms and Hymns*, 1738. Tune: SAGINA, Thomas Campbell, *Bouquet*, 1825. Public Domain

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