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# From Song Leader To Worship Leader



## CONFESSIONS OF TRANSFORMED SONG LEADERS

By Rick Flatt

By Jeff Nelson

*You conceive of your role as being more than just a song director. Give us a title and job description of what you do in the Sunday worship.*

**RF:** My role as a worship leader has evolved over a number of years. I began as a "song leader," and the focus of my interest was almost exclusively musical. Through the years, in work with various worship committees, and through the direction and expectations of the elders, my role has evolved to the extent that I am now in charge of doing more than selecting songs.

From the beginning, even as a "song leader," I have been concerned to connect the various aspects of a worship service together in meaningful relationship. I have always, to the dismay of some, commented on the meanings of songs. Now I am responsible for the relatedness of all the aspects of our worship -- the songs, readings, prayers, confessions, etc. And so it has been left to me to narrate the service. Basically, it is my job to see that the "elements" of worship are arranged meaningfully.

*What are the three major "theological" goals you have for worship.*

**RF:** First and foremost, worship must recognize the awesome majesty of the God we worship. Whether you call it transcendence or something else, worship must remind us that God is the creator and we are his creatures. This stance for worship gives a natural or organic meaning for anything else we do in worship.

Second, it is essential that Christians remember and relive their salvation experience in worship. Ours must be the experience of

**JN:** Title - Worship Leader

Job description - I am responsible for the planning and implementing of each assembly. I give a lot of attention to the mechanics prior to the assembly so that during the assembly there do not seem to be any mechanics.

I am responsible for the flow of the assembly. Every assembly is planned in narrative form and if there are missing pieces to the story I will add them spontaneously. By that I mean that each service has a thread or story that runs through the entirety of the assembly time. The worship leader must be sensitive to the "drama" as it unfolds in worship. It is my role to bring to the worshipper's consciousness the focus of the worship.

**JN:** First, it is hoped that our worship will inspire the same response that Isaiah had in Isaiah 6. (a) We will acknowledge the awesomeness and holiness of God, and literally and physically experience His presence, (b) We will admit our sinful nature and condition, (c) We will accept His forgiveness as our sin is atoned for, and (d) We will become messengers for God because of what He has done for us.

Second, the truth of our assemblies

Isaiàh. The redemptive drama should be worked out in our lives again and again through our worship. This allows us to tell the truth about our world. As we confess our sins, and receive our forgiveness at the foot of the cross, we remember what is real in this universe. It is then that we can respond to God and others with bended knee. Worship must do this for us.

Finally, we must emphasize that God is at work in our worship. We are changed through our participation in the gifts -- the sacraments -- he has given us.

should be so apparent to an unbeliever that by their observing they will be led to "fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" (1 Cor. 14:24)

Third, we hope our worship will facilitate the atmosphere for transformation to occur. We should enter every assembly expecting to be transformed and leave knowing we have been to some extent. Worship transforms us by the renewing of our minds. (Romans 12:2)

### ***How do you prepare readers, prayer leaders, etc. for their participation in the worship?***

**RF:** This is an extremely hard thing to do well. I would like to be able to train people to read well in the worship -- or whatever training the given task would require.

I have done things over the years in an attempt to help leaders reflect on their role in the worship. Printed instructions and suggestions have been used. If there is a special reading or part in the service that requires a sensitivity to the overall structure of the service, I will contact the participant and brief them on their assignment.

Given, however, the lack of my time and the lack of motivation for training, I find myself selecting individuals who I know can do a good job with the particular assignment given them. I look at their abilities as spiritual gifts offered in service to the family. Not everyone has those gifts.

**JN:** I find the material and ask the right person for the medium. I give them a copy of the reading, ask them to come early if it requires a "run through", and make sure they understand how their part fits the "story."

If it is a prayer I give them specifics for their prayer with an explanation of the theme or sometimes give them a written prayer as a guideline. The best way is to write a letter during the week and give a paragraph summary of the theme and allow some time for them to plan a well thought-out prayer.

A lot of times we will have congregational readings or dual readings that I prepare. The material is put it in folders, with each speaker's part highlighted. We run through the reading before the service begins.

### ***How important is variety in what you do? Is there a theological justification/mandate for variety?***

**RF:** It is, and it is not. I feel that the basic content of the worship experience should remain relatively uniform. It is God's discipline in our lives to worship him with a basic content -- a content derived from who he is and what he has done. Praise, confession, gospel, forgiveness, response -- these things do not vary from week to week.

The forms, however, that carry the content can and must be diverse. A change in form can awaken us to new appreciation for

**JN:** Variety is very important because so many different resources are necessary to cover the wide spectrum of topics to be considered in worship. Variety is also the name of the game for "unity in worship". I firmly believe that different styles and elements relate to different groups of people. It is best to try to meet the needs of many by using a variety of forms and expressions.

There may not be a theological justification/mandate for variety but I believe the sermon



what we are doing in worship. I am especially intrigued by variety in hymns. To me, there is something special about sharing a hymn with Christians throughout the ages. A mixing of contemporary hymns and the historical hymns of the church brings a healthy diversity to worship.

has had too much of a billing in the past. There are other areas that have been neglected but are every bit as helpful, instructive, or meaningful as the sermon. Variety allows emphasis to be put in different areas other than the sermon so that the experience of worship is more encompassing and balanced.

*Describe the process you go through in putting together a worship service.*

**RF:** My starting place may be different from many within our tradition. I feel it very important that the worship not be determined by my whims or the felt needs of the congregation. There must be a discipline that allows a church to explore the various riches of God's word throughout the year. To help me with this, I consult the Common Lectionary. It systematically gives readings for each Sunday so that over a period of time the majority of scripture is covered. For each Sunday there is a Psalm, an Old Testament reading, a Gospel reading, and an Epistle reading. I do not always use all of the readings, but every week they suggest themes and structures in presenting God's story in worship.

After selecting scriptures, I arrange them as anchor points in the service that allow us to move through the basic content of our redemptive story with God. I have a few resources that suggest songs that go with particular Bible verses. Sometimes I use these. Sometimes appropriate songs come to my head.

At that point, I fill in the service with whatever might be appropriate -- readings, prayers, confessions, etc.

Even though I use the Common Lectionary to a great extent, I do not think our services could be described as "Liturgical." We are still "Free Church" in our approach to worship. We are not in any way bound to the Lectionary with its elaborate liturgies. But we do have the benefit of the discipline of the Lectionary which guards us from being narcissistic in our worship.

**JN:** I begin with the sermon outline that I receive from the minister of the Word on Wednesday or Thursday.

Prayer is my first task so that the Spirit will lead me in preparing an assembly that will be transforming for the worshipper.

I then read the outline several times and decide what elements will capture the narrative best. (i.e., topical scripture readings, multiple scripture readings, dual readings, congregational readings, meditative readings, special thoughts or readings focusing on communion or the offering, specific songs and types of songs for specific reasons, etc.)

I try to formulate the narrative that will make the sermon outline and the rest of the assembly cohesive.

I put all of the resources I think I might use in front of me. It usually takes several hours to find the right songs and other pieces of the story.

I contact all the people that are going to participate so I can get a commitment and print their name in the program.

I write out a detailed "Assembly Order" that goes in the program that is placed in the pews every week. This is to allow people to know what to expect since the assembly is different every week.

I put together a songsheet almost every week because the hymns that are most appropriate are not found in our hymnal.

***What Resources would you recommend for other worship leaders?***

**HYMNALS:**

**Great Songs of the Church**,  
Abilene: ACU Press, 1986.

**The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration**,  
Waco: Word Music 1986.

**Worship His Majesty**,  
Alexandria, Ind.: Gaither Music  
Company, 1987.

**CONTEMPORARY SONG BOOKS:**

**Exalt Him! Songs for Celebration and Praise**,  
Compiled and arranged by Tom Fettke  
Word Music, 1989.

**I Will Sing and Praise the Lord**,  
Charlotte, NC: PTL Music & Publishing,  
1986.

**Rejoice! and Sing to the Lord, vol. 1 and 2.**,  
Reid Lancaster and Gary L Mabry  
Austin, Texas: Sweet Publishing Co.

**DEVOTIONAL LITERATURE** (used for special communion readings etc):

Carlton C. Buck, **At the Lord's Table**  
St. Louis, Missouri, The Bethany Press,  
1956.

Ard Hoven, **Meditations and Prayers for the Lord's Table**, Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing, 1974.

Laurence C. Keene, **Offering Meditations & Prayers**, St. Louis, Missouri: CBP Press, 1984.

C. S. Lewis, **The Joyful Christian**, New York: Macmillan, 1977.

Max Lucado, **No Wonder They Call Him the Savior**, Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1986.

\_\_\_\_\_, **God Came Near, Chronicles of the Christ**, Portland, Oregon:

Multnomah Press, 1987.

Lee Carter Maynard, **Memories of the Master**, Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing, 1973.

Lloyd John Ogilvie, **The Cup of Wonder**, Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1976.

J.B. Phillips, **The Newborn Christian**, New York: Macmillan, 1978.

**RESOURCES FOR CREATIVE WORSHIP PLANNING:**

**The Book of Worship**, Nashville, Tn.: United Methodist Publishing House, 1985.

Ronald Allen & Gordon Borrer, **Worship, Rediscovering the Missing Jewel**, Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1982.

Peter Bauer, ed., **Handbook for the Common Lectionary**, Geneva: Presbyterian Assembly, 1987.

Karen Burton Mains, **Making Sunday Special**, Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987.

Donald A. Spencer, **Hymn and Scripture Selection Guide**, Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1977.

Jack R. Taylor, **The Hallelujah Factor**, Nashville, Ten: Broadman Press, 1983.

Ann Weems, **Reaching for Rainbows**, Philadelphia, Penn.: The Westminster Press, 1980.

William H. Willimon, **With Glad and Generous Hearts**, Nashville, Tenn.: The Upper Room, 1986.

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