

**HOW
WOULD
JESUS
LEAD
WORSHIP
?**

Sara & Sam Hargreaves

How Would Jesus Lead Worship?: Fully Revised and Updated Second Edition

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PART 1



CHAPTER 1

HOW WOULD JESUS LEAD WORSHIP?

We have worshipped to the beat of hand-drums in a Peruvian jungle, and with massed choirs in Canterbury Cathedral. We have sung alongside homeless, drug-addicted women in Luton, and suited millionaire business leaders in Cambridge. We have joined with Lutheran liturgy in Sweden, and Pentecostal praise in London. We have met God with toddlers in our local park, and with pensioners in our local parish church. What unites these experiences, these diverse groups? Not style. No single approach to music, or prayer, or service structure can bring harmony to these unlikely family members. What unites them is Jesus.

Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. (*Ephesians 2:13-14*)

In an increasingly polarised world where people try to put up walls, troll their enemies and hide under their headphones, we desperately need some unity. And we won't find that unity by pushing a particular brand of worship style, or a one-size-fits all resource. Only Jesus can bring us together. Through Jesus, previously divided people 'come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us' (Ephesians 2:18 NLT).

If we say 'Jesus is our worship leader', what springs to your mind? Do you imagine Jesus with an acoustic guitar and a microphone, leading a band in his latest song? Or perhaps you picture him conducting a choir, or playing an organ, or guiding a congregation through a church service?

We like the question 'How would Jesus lead worship?' because it immediately reveals assumptions about what people think 'worship' is. Worship has become, for many people, the thing they do in church, or narrowed down further, to the thing they do as they sing certain songs. People talk about 'worship leaders', 'worship times' and 'worship spaces'.

Since we were teenagers we have been involved leading worship with songs. We've been employed by churches and trained teams across the UK to develop their music. We love to sing to God! But when we look to Jesus for his guidance in singing, we uncover just one Bible verse: 'When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives' (Matthew 26:30).¹ This doesn't really feel like much to build a worship ministry on...

¹ There is actually a bit more to the idea of Jesus singing than that. See the end of Chapter 2, and Michael O'Connor, 'The Singing of Jesus' in Begbie, Guthrie

I'LL BRING YOU MORE THAN A SONG

What if worship is *more than singing*? What if the whole, grand story of the Bible is concerned with a God who created people to worship him? The Bible uses a whole range of words which we translate or understand as 'worship' and most of them are not referring narrowly to music or singing.² We want to suggest that the following three terms might begin to sum up God's heart for worship. His desire is that all of humanity would:

Draw Near - engage with God in close, reverent relationship;

Obey - honour God by living his way; and

Glorify - proclaim God's ways to the world.

We know that, sadly, the perfect relationship of worship which God intended in creation was broken.³ Adam and Eve and the people of Israel failed to *Obey* God, their actions did not *Glorify* him and this resulted in not being able to *Draw Near*. And yet this gracious God made ways for his people to keep coming to him through the tabernacle, the priests and the sacrificial system.

Then, at the climax of his story, God stepped into our shoes. Jesus showed us what a life of worship *really* looked like. He lived the perfect life of *Drawing Near* to his Father,

(eds), *Resonant Witness* (Eerdmans, 2011) and Reggie Kidd, *With One Voice: Discovering Christ's Song in Our Worship* (Baker Books, 2005).

2 For a survey of biblical words for worship see David Peterson, *Engaging with God* (Apollos, 1992) pages 55-74.

3 Genesis 3, Romans 1:21.

Obeying God's will and bringing him *Glory* by the Holy Spirit. He fulfilled and exceeded the Old Testament system by becoming our eternal high priest and our once-for-all sacrifice. And through his life, death and resurrection he has made a way for us to worship with his kind of intimacy, obedience and confidence.

COMING BACK TO THE HEART OF WORSHIP

From this perspective, Jesus is not just someone we sing about, but the very heart of our worship. He is the one who shows us what true worship looks like, and he is the one who makes our worship possible. His life and ministry becomes the template for every life and every worship ministry. Not because he tells us how to choose songs or play the piano, but because he shows us what it means to *Draw Near*, *Obey* and *Glorify* our heavenly Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit. And he doesn't just demonstrate this for us to try and copy. He takes us by the hand and *leads us* into worship.

Is this a new idea to you? Do you find it intriguing, exciting, or are you scratching your head wondering where in the Bible we've got this from? To tackle these questions we will spend Chapter 2 unpacking the concept of Jesus as our worship leader. We'll have a particular focus on the letter to the Hebrews, and we'll delve into some theological treasures. It is a meaty chapter, and some people might be tempted to skip ahead to the more practical stuff in Chapters 3-6. Many worship teams and leaders want get on with the worshipping, rather than stand around talking about it. But we'd encourage

you to stay with us, to reflect deeper on who Jesus is and so find yourself transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ:

... our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him. (2 Corinthians 3:18 MSG)

DOES OUR MUSIC MINISTRY MATTER?

Another question you might be asking is: If Jesus is the true worship leader, what does that mean for us as musicians, singers, service leaders, people who prepare and lead church services? If Jesus has made the ‘new and living way’ for us to come to God, does it even make a difference how we choose songs, or arrange music, or craft prayers? Does the way we lead when we gather on a Sunday matter?

This book is here to tell you that *your worship ministry matters*. In our work with engageworship we have spent the past decade travelling across the country, training and resourcing local church music teams. In every place, we see groups of (mostly) volunteer musicians and creatives, investing their precious time into church services. We get inspired by the commitment, pastoral care and creative energy which is poured into gathered worship week after week, and we believe that what you do makes a difference in the lives of your congregation. Not only that - the truth is that *God* delights in every offering made for him, every effort in leadership, every unseen bit of planning and administration.⁴ The way you serve

4 1 Corinthians 15:58.

God by offering your gifts and talents matters to him, and we believe that he longs to see your worship ministry flourish.

The best Bible story we can think of to illustrate this is the offering of the loaves and fish.⁵ The small boy prepared his little lunch and then carried it around the Sea of Galilee and up a mountain, as he followed Jesus and listened to his teaching. The few loaves and fish might have been enough for the boy, but they were clearly never going to be enough for all those thousands of people! Yet the boy offered them to Jesus. Jesus took them, blessed them, broke them, and gave them.⁶ In the hands of Jesus, that small offering became *enough*.

In the same way, we as worship leaders come each week with what is in our hands: our few songs, our musical arrangements. We come with our prayers, our ideas for creative elements and service structures. They are the best we have, they might even be good. But they are never going to be enough to help every person in our church connect with God - it's not humanly possible to provide something that suits every single age, personality type, spiritual maturity and ability. And more than that, how could our small gifts and efforts be worthy of our Holy God? There are times when, like the disciples faced with more than 5000 hungry people, what we have feels deeply inadequate to the task at hand.

5 John 6:1-14.

6 The words used in Luke 9:16 - 'took, gave thanks, broke, gave' - are the same words Luke uses to describe Jesus' actions at the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19). Luke mysteriously connects this boy's offering with Jesus' own offering of himself. Henri Nouwen expands on these four words 'taken, blessed, broken, given' in his book *Life of the Beloved*, and we turned this idea into a communion service. <http://engageworship.org/TBBGcommunion>

And yet, Jesus receives what is in our hands. He takes our offering, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it. When we offer our worship ministry through Jesus it becomes *enough*. It becomes worthy. It becomes significant.

Asking ‘How would Jesus lead worship?’ doesn’t diminish the importance of singing and services. It expands it. The knowledge that ultimately *Jesus* draws us near to the Father by the Spirit doesn’t cancel out the gifts and skills you bring. It humbles, perfects and elevates them to be of eternal significance.

BEYOND STYLE

Another good reason to focus on Jesus is that it helps us put to one side (at least for one blissful moment) arguments about worship *style*. A lot of discussion around worship centres on stylistic questions: Should we use hymns or songs? Screens or books? Agreed liturgy or improvised prayers? In-ear monitors or floor wedges? These are not irrelevant questions, but they are also not at the heart of what worship is really about.

You might want to think about worship styles being like clothing styles. Fashion choices are made based on culture and background, and people will attempt to express their personality through what they wear. Clothing is not irrelevant - there are culturally appropriate things to wear in different situations (for example, avoid t-shirts and shorts at a traditional funeral). But ultimately we know it is superficial to judge a person on their outward appearance. In a similar way,

assessing worship simply on the basis of its outward style risks missing a deeper significance.

If someone says ‘I want to be more like Jesus’, we would be quite surprised to see them start dressing in a one-piece linen garment and sandals. That is not what we mean by ‘being more like Jesus’.

Similarly, ‘worshipping more like Jesus’ doesn’t mean taking a course in everyday Aramaic and learning some ancient Near Eastern scales and harmonies. Constance Cherry points out that Jesus engaged in a range of gathered worship practices relevant to his context:

He was a worshipper from birth who consistently, even daily, worshipped at the temple and the synagogue, kept the Sabbath, spent much time in prayer, participated in the regular worship rituals [...] celebrated the Jewish annual festivals of worship, pronounced blessings upon people, sang the liturgy, preached, and taught in the temple and synagogue.⁷

The distinctive ways Jesus worshipped are important for us to look at, but the real challenge is to delve beyond the practices to see the principles and attitudes underneath. Christ-like worship for us today means grasping the heart of how Jesus honoured the Father by the Spirit in his day, and then expressing that faithfully in your context.

7 Constance Cherry, *Worship Like Jesus: A Guide For Every Follower* (Abingdon Press, 2019) page 5.

Christ-like worship ought to be ‘indigenous’ or ‘incarnated’ - expressed in stylistic and cultural forms which make sense to our community and the people we are trying to reach. The exciting thing is that this can take almost limitless forms, and be expressed in myriad ways. It has been our experience as we have travelled to a wide variety of churches, that Christ-like worship might look ‘traditional’ or, equally, ‘contemporary’ (whatever either of those words mean in your context). It can be loud or quiet, formal or spontaneous, highly visual or word-based. Rather than criticising or complaining about people who worship differently to us, we ought to celebrate the rich diversity of worship expressions across the world, and continue to expand our own tradition as we encounter new approaches. As worship historian James White puts it:

The God whom we worship, after all, seems to relish diversity. If no two leaves of grass are the same and certainly no two people are identical, then it does not seem strange that there is so much variety in cultures. [...] Each culture will have its own contribution to make to the totality of Christian worship.⁸

This book is not asking you to change your culture or style, but to assess what you do in the light of Jesus’ attitudes and values.

8 James F White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Abingdon Press 1993), page 180.

WHAT DID JESUS DO?

We started leading worship back in the 1990s, a time in the Christian subculture when everybody knew what ‘WWJD’ stood for. The colourful wristbands encouraged us to think ‘What Would Jesus Do?’ about each situation. It is a good question, reflecting the biblical challenge ‘Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did’ (1 John 2:5-6). But later, during our time at theological college, one of our lecturers (the wonderful, late Lish Eves) would challenge some interpretations of this slogan. She would say: ‘the trouble with What Would Jesus Do is first you need to know what Jesus did!’

Of course, she was right. It is easy to justify anything with the comment ‘that is how Jesus would do it’. You can co-opt Jesus into any scheme using that approach. So when we began asking ‘How would Jesus lead worship?’, we realised we would need to delve deep into the life of Jesus with fresh eyes. We focused on the Gospel of Luke, studying and reflecting on the character and attitudes of Jesus we found there. We then organised our thinking around four key points (used as headings for Chapters 3-6) which we have found useful in helping us encapsulate our findings. We saw Jesus modelling for us a life and ministry of someone who is a:

- Humble Servant
- Leader with Authority
- Creative Communicator
- Reliant on the Spirit

In Part 2 we will be unpacking where we see these in Jesus' life, and how they speak to worship ministry today. Our goal is to be both Jesus-centred but also practical, finding applications for how these things work out in church life.

These are the points which struck us after prayerfully studying Luke through the lens of worship. We have found them helpful for our own ministry and as we've taught them to church teams. As you begin to look at the gospels with the question 'How would Jesus lead worship?' in mind, you will probably come up with some different thoughts and categories.⁹ In fact, we very much hope you will. Our aim is to get you thinking, discussing, and applying what you discover to your own church.

HOLDING TENSIONS

Although we might try to avoid it, tension is actually a hugely important creative force. Tension in a movie is what keeps the plot moving along. Tensions created by suspensions and cadences are what give shape to music. Even tuning an instrument like a piano, guitar or drum kit is an exercise in tension - pulling one thing against another to create a resonant, pleasing noise.

Often, Christian thinking about God requires holding ideas in tension. For example, in Chapter 2 we talk about the incarnation. When the early Church needed to formulate biblical truth into doctrine to avoid misunderstanding and heresy, they had to hold together two apparently opposite

9 For example see Cherry, *Worship Like Jesus*.

truths - that the incarnate Jesus was (and is) both fully God and fully human. We also talk in Chapter 2 about the Trinity - that in the Bible we clearly see one God who is three persons. The creeds do not allow us to collapse those tensions and, the more we delve into them, the more we will find that they give us life.

Many of our problems to do with worship in the contemporary church come from the collapse of tensions that should be held and celebrated. For example, we choose either the 'transcendence' of God, focusing on his power and majesty, or we cosy up to the 'immanent', intimate God, majoring on his love and grace. Instead, these attributes are supposed to be pulling against one another all the time. We need to proclaim and experience our God who is holy and beyond us, and yet at the same time makes himself known and available through his Son and Spirit.

Turning very practically to the ways we plan worship, think about the tensions between reaching seekers with easy-access gospel presentations (spiritual milk) and taking believers deeper in teaching and worship (spiritual meat).¹⁰ Or the choice between hymns, with their depth of lyrical content but often low cultural relevance, and the contemporary but sometimes thematically lightweight songs. Or the 'we' of corporate worship versus the 'I' of personal response; planning versus spontaneity; quiet reflection versus noisy celebration.¹¹

¹⁰ Hebrews 5:13-14.

¹¹ For more examples of holding tensions in gathered worship, see Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Crossway, 2008) pages 153-210.

In Jesus, we see someone who does not fall for the temptation to collapse tensions. For example, he knows that his kingdom is not *of* this world,¹² yet he makes a difference to people *in* the world.¹³ He came to save the whole of humankind, yet has time to stop with one individual.¹⁴ He is the Lord of Lords, yet he came to serve.¹⁵ His yoke is easy and his burden is light, yet he takes up his cross and calls us to do the same.¹⁶

Looking at the life of Jesus as a guide and model for our worship has helped us to see that we can often make false choices, narrowing down our worship style or practice to please ourselves or our congregations, when in fact Jesus calls us to hold things in tension and celebrate the differences. The chapter headings in Part 2 of this book pull against each other in very important ways: we are to follow Jesus' example in being 'Humble Servants' of our congregations and our communities, and at the same time we are called to be 'Leaders with Authority'. This might sound impossible, but Jesus shows us how. We are to develop our 'Creative Communication'; planning and rehearsing music, arts and other worship experiences fit for a king, and yet at the same time remain 'Reliant on the Spirit', not our own gifts, being adaptable and ready to change our plans at his leading. Jesus

12 John 18:36.

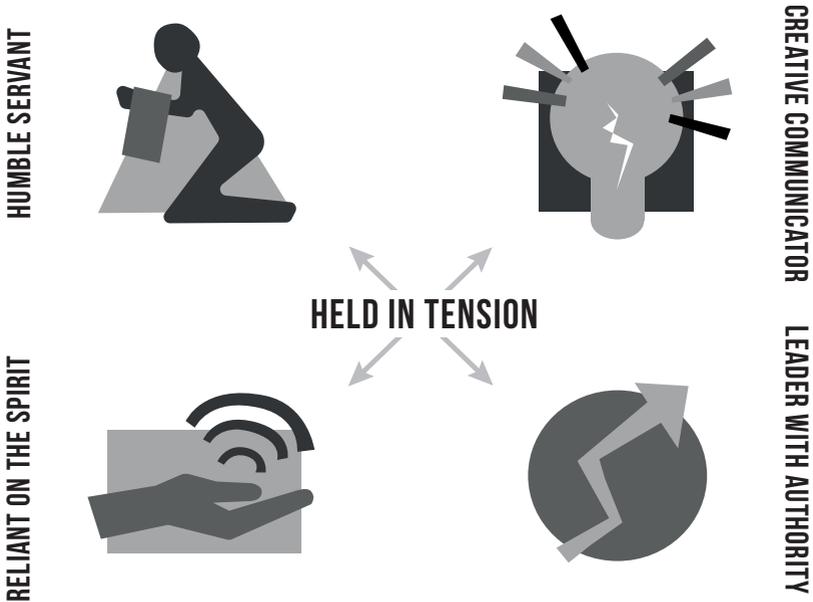
13 Luke 7:22.

14 As seen when he is on the way to heal a child but stops to speak to the woman who touches the hem of his robe - Mark 5:24-34.

15 Matthew 20:28.

16 Matthew 11:30; 16:24.

takes what is humanly impossible and shows how, with God, all things are possible.¹⁷



USING THIS BOOK

We have created a video training course which can be used alongside this book. It is available entirely free online. We encourage you to take a look at the course and consider if you might run it with your team or some friends.¹⁸

If following the course, we suggest this reading plan:

¹⁷ Matthew 19:26.

¹⁸ <https://engageworship.org/VideoCourse> Here you will also find a free downloadable Leader's Guide with more information about how to run the sessions.

Session 1 - Read this chapter and Chapter 2 (Jesus our Worship Leader).

Session 2 - Read Chapter 3 (Humble Servant).

Session 3 - Read the first half of Chapter 4 (Leader with Authority) up to page 93.

Session 4 - Read the second half of Chapter 4, from pages 93 to 104.

Session 5 - Read Chapter 5 (Creative Communicator).

Session 6 - Read Chapter 6 (Reliant on the Spirit).

Alternatively, this book can be read without engaging with the videos. It is our aim that you grow both in understanding and practical experience as you read. Under the heading ‘Ideas to Try’ you will see, throughout the book, examples and suggestions for applying the teaching in corporate worship. The end of Chapter 2 presents a number of ideas as to how the theology can be applied in services. ‘Leader with Authority’ talks about how worship can be planned as a journey. ‘Creative Communicator’ is brimming with creative ideas for how to move worship beyond simply singing, and ‘Humble Servant’ looks at how we can fuse worship with social action. Finally, ‘Reliant on the Spirit’ gives practical tips for creating space to receive the Spirit and develop spontaneity.

We also want your experience of this book to be an act of worship in itself, so the heading ‘Pause to Worship’ is an invitation to put the book down and do some kind of activity to respond to God. It can be tempting to skip this kind of thing when you read a book, but give it a try and we pray that you

will experience drawing closer to God. In fact, here is the first 'Pause to Worship' to finish this chapter.

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

What is in your hands?

For Sam's birthday he received the gift of a hand-carved bread board, with a beautifully inscribed image in the top corner of five loaves and two fish. Rather than keep it in the kitchen, it sits on his desk. When he gets overwhelmed by life and worship ministry, he uses this board to help him come to God afresh.

Find a piece of paper and create your own simple drawing of five loaves and two fish. Reflect on the challenges in front of you when it comes to leading other people in worship. What is difficult? What feels impossible?

Then reflect on what God has put in your hands. What are your five loaves and two fish? What gifts, passions, opportunities or partnerships has God given to you? Write or draw them on your paper.

Think about how inadequate these gifts seem in the light of the needs you face. Choose to offer your gifts back to Jesus as the boy offered his loaves and fish. Allow Jesus to take, give thanks, break and give them.

Thank Jesus for receiving your gifts, for using them, for making them enough to lead his people in worship, in the power of the Holy Spirit.