

CRAFTING INCREDIBLE WORSHIP SETS



HELPING YOUR PEOPLE
PASSIONATELY PRAISE JESUS

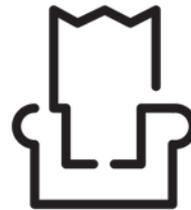
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Crafting Incredible Worship Sets

Helping your people passionately praise Jesus

By Alex Enfiedjian

The purpose of this e-book is to help you more effectively craft incredible, engaging, God-honoring worship sets that sweep your people up into the passionate praise of Jesus!



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Introduction:

Worship Leader, you have been called to the unique and weighty responsibility of planning your church's weekly worship experience. If you're anything like me, you take that responsibility seriously. You want to do your best to provide your church with an excellent, beautiful, seamless, Christ-exalting, truth-bearing, emotion-moving experience. But how do we do that? With so many songs, keys, tempos, themes, lyrics, arrangements and more, there are many pitfalls we must avoid.

I'm sure you've been to church services that have made you cringe. Maybe the whole set was one slow dirge. Maybe the transitions were so poorly planned, that there were five seconds of dead silence between each song. Maybe the lyrics were so murky that you weren't sure if you were singing to Jesus, or your ex-girlfriend from high school. Whatever it was that caused you to cringe, we must seek to do better for our own churches.

Over the years I have learned a few things about crafting a great, engaging worship set. I'm writing this e-book to share those hard-learned lessons with you, that I might spare you (and your congregants) some cringe-worthy worship times. So let's dive in and learn about some of the filters that will help you craft incredible times of musical worship.

The foundation and absolute most vital component of a powerful worship service (besides Jesus) is song selection. The songs you choose, the lyrics they hold, the emotions they evoke, the order that they are in, all play a vital and fundamental role in shaping your people's worship experience. I cannot convey strongly enough the importance of prayerfully and carefully crafting our song sets to provide the maximum impact for the thirty-or-so minutes that our churches gather to sing.

I am writing this book as a six-step process to creating a great worship set. These six steps are the steps that I take when crafting worship sets for my own church. It may be helpful to view these steps as filters. For example, as you sit down to pick songs for Sunday, you may start with hundreds of songs at your disposal. As you put them through filter #1, you are left with fifty. Next, you take those fifty songs and put them through filter #2 and you're left with 13, and so on and so forth until you arrive at your final five or six song set. The steps or filters help you decide which songs your people need to sing and in what order. With that in mind, let's get into the six steps to crafting a great worship set.



Picking Your Songs

Step #1 – PRAY

Before you start, stop. Say a prayer. Ask God for wisdom. Ask Him to guide you in your picking process and to bring to mind which songs He wants His people to be singing. We cannot

underestimate the power of seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance as we choose songs for our people. He knows the things that our people have been going through that week. He knows the truths that they need to be reminded of. Spend several minutes seeking Him and asking Him to lead you in this process. Once you pray, trust God to guide you as you move on to step two.

Step #2 – DETERMINE THE THEME

In many worship services I've been to, it seems that the Worship Leader put on a blindfold, stuck his hand into a basket and pulled out five songs at random. Or perhaps he just picked five songs he enjoys singing. There isn't anything inherently wrong with that, however, I have found that the most impactful worship services are those that adhere to a single theme. A common practice is to pick songs that match the theme of the pastor's sermon. For example, if your pastor will be speaking on Righteousness through Christ, you'll want to pick songs that expound upon this topic such as: "Nothing But the Blood", "The Solid Rock", "Beneath The Waters", etc. Picking songs that emphasize the theme of the lesson help drive the point home and create a powerful and cohesive service where everything just seems to "click" in people's hearts and minds. Contrast this with choosing a bunch of random songs about random and varying topics and you've cluttered and confused your people's hearts and minds. That is not to say that you must *always* pick songs based on the theme; sometimes God will guide you to pick certain songs that may seem off topic because He knows that someone in the congregation really needs to sing those truths. But as a general rule, make sure that a few of the songs fit the main theme of the service. In particular, take special care to make sure the song before the sermon drives home your

pastor's main point. Practically speaking, I typically look through my master list of songs, and pick out five to ten songs that strongly support my pastor's message, knowing that many of them won't make the final list as I run them through the rest of the five filters. An invaluable tool in this regard is SongSelect.com, a website that allows you to search for songs by category or keyword.

An alternate way to attack this "thematic approach" would be to read through and pray through the passage that will be taught. As you do, pay close attention to which songs God brings to mind as you read through and meditate on that scripture.

** One important note about song selection: I believe it is vitally important to pick songs with lyrics that are both true and *clear*. Many songs today lack "lyrical clarity", composed of seemingly unrelated Christian sounding phrases without any clear unifying point. In my opinion, murky thoughts and vague lyrics won't lead to powerful times of worship. Remember, Jesus said that He is seeking worshippers who will worship Him in Spirit and in *Truth*. If you can't describe the key concept of a song in a single sentence after hearing it once or twice, then it's probably too vague to put on your people's lips. As the gatekeepers of our church's "worship vocabulary" we must take caution to make sure that the songs that shape our people's theology are biblically sound, Christ exalting, and *clear!* Remember, singing is one of the strongest mnemonic devices, so choose wisely!

Step #3 – KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

One of the most important questions you can ask while choosing your songs is “Who am I leading?” This is the time to really visualize your audience. What is their age group? What are their stylistic preferences? What are they facing in their lives? Where is the church as a whole in its journey? What songs do they know and love? Choose songs with your congregation in mind. Pick songs for *them!* Remember, our job is to serve the people we are leading, not pick songs that we like or that make our voice sound best. Playing “Your Love Never Fails” with 5 electric guitars and a techno drum loop probably isn’t going to help the older people in your church worship God, but might work great at a youth event. Know who you’re leading, and know what helps them connect with God. That is what step #3 is all about.

Step #4 – KNOW YOUR BAND

A corollary to knowing your audience is to also know your band! Not all bands are created equal! If you are trying to sound like Hillsong United and you’re in a rural church in some small town with two banjo players and a kazoo player, you’re in for quite a disappointment! That’s why it’s so important to consider who is playing on your worship team that week. Here are two aspects you should consider as you pick and plan your songs: 1) Instrumentation 2) Talent.

1) Instrumentation: Firstly, you need to consider which instruments you will have at your disposal on any particular week. If you only have an acoustic guitar and a djembe (hand drum) scheduled, you will probably want to avoid playing big, epic, anthem songs like “One Thing Remains” or “Great I Am”

which will sound weak and empty with only those two instruments. You'll have to pick songs that will work with a more acoustic vibe. On the other hand, if your team is big and robust, consider which songs might best take advantage of all the instruments and how you will utilize them to best build the song. Which instruments are playing will play a large part in determining which songs you choose.

2) Talent: Secondly, you must consider the talent level of the people on your team for any given week. Not everyone is equally gifted or experienced, and you need to keep this in mind while choosing your songs. If you have a drummer who struggles just to keep the tempo without falling apart, you will want to avoid picking overly technical songs with lots of breaks and difficult beats. I'm not saying you should never stretch your teams musically, but you should definitely keep in mind their *current* musical abilities while you plan for the coming weekend. You must choose songs around your teams, their instrumentation, and their musical ability.

Ok, take a breath; we're about halfway through the process. Steps one through four should have filtered you down to about 5 to 10 songs. Now we can start weeding out the ones that won't work by arranging your set order. You will quickly see which songs are unnecessary or just plain don't fit in your set.



Crafting Your Set

Step #5 – CHOOSING SONG ORDER

Song order is just as important as song selection. You want to take people on a journey musically, thematically, and spiritually. The order of songs and the themes and keys of songs should flow well together to invoke emotion and help people respond to the truths that they are singing. There are three factors when deciding what order to place your songs in when building your set. They are:

1) Tempos: Tempo is how fast or slow a song is played. Many worship leaders start their worship set off with faster, more upbeat songs. This is a good technique because it brings a lot of life, joy, energy, and passion to the room. Any upbeat songs that can get people's bodies engaged during worship (clapping, dancing, raising hands) such as the song "Unchanging" ("so we raise up holy hands..."), are great ways to start the service. If you can get people to engage with their bodies, their spirits are usually quick to follow. There is just something about how we were created that our bodies and souls work in tandem. You do not always have to start your set with a fast song, but if you begin with something slow, it should be intentional and powerful and set a tone of worship that you build upon for the rest of your set. Often, worship leaders will start with a fast song, move to a couple of mid-tempo songs for the middle of the set, and close with a big, slower, anthem-type song as the capstone of the set.

You can experiment and find out what your group responds to best.

So now take the 5 to 10 remaining songs and pass them through the tempo filter. Do you have too many fast songs? Too many mid-tempo songs? Too many slow songs? Which ones will you cut?

2) Song Keys: Next you will pass your songs through the Song Key filter. Songs should easily flow from one key to the next. The best way to do that is to make sure your next song is in a “relative key” to your current one. A relative key is usually the four or the five chord of your current key. If you have questions about which keys work well together, please refer to the “Relative Keys” chart listed in the appendix of this e-book. Some keys just don’t transition well from one song to the next, so pass your songs through the “Key” filter and see which ones are still good options for your final set. Typically, I try to change keys at least once, but maximum twice, during a four song set. Changing keys can help create a sense of movement or journeying. Keeping the entire set in one key can become monotone or drone on for too long (though sometimes you can make it work if you get creative with the musical arrangements). Typically by changing keys higher up the scale, you are creating a sense of building intensity or anticipation. Inversely, dropping to a lower key can lower the energy, which can be good if you want to do a more introspective / reflective song. Each worship song can typically be played in several different keys while still maintaining a comfortable vocal range, so make sure that for each song you are choosing keys that the average singer will be able to sing easily. In other words, you don’t want the song to be too high or too low for the congregation to sing comfortably. Again, you’re not

picking keys that make your voice sound amazing; you're picking keys that are helpful for the congregation to sing in. A good rule of thumb is to never have the congregation sing higher than the high E string on a guitar or middle E on a piano (or the corresponding octave for female worship leaders). That is about the highest note that is comfortable for the average singer. That is not a hard and fast rule, but it is generally helpful to keep in mind.

Once you've put your songs through the tempo and key filters, you can now put them through the "Adoration Filter".

3) Ending with Adoration: Most of the songs you've chosen should already fit your main theme pretty well, so now you just want to make sure that you've got the most powerful and intense songs toward the end of your set. The last songs of your set should be songs that focus solely on God and what He has done for us. These are "adoration songs". "How Great Is Our God", "Jesus Paid It All", "Revelation Song", "How Great Thou Art", and "Great I Am", are great examples of big songs that have a strong God-ward focus. Ending with the focus on God really helps bring a sense of completion to the set. You've taken your people on a journey, showing different facets of God's character, and now you end by letting them get a long, beautiful glimpse of God. This gives them the chance to really sing out their praise to God for who He is and what He's done in their life, thus concluding their "journey" of worship through song.

** It should be noted that while these three filters (tempo, keys, and adoration) are listed in chronological order, they are often happening simultaneously as you piece together your "puzzle" of a worship set, and as you find what works best.



Spicing It Up

A few more thoughts before we move on to the final step of the process. Now that you have your songs picked and in the best order; try one or more of these tricks to really take your set to the next level:

Tags: If you're looking to enhance a particular song or theme, you can consider adding a "tag" to one of the songs in your set. A tag is a chorus or line from a different song that you add to your current song for emphasis and effect. Usually you'll add a tag to the end of a song to "linger" in that place or on that thought a little longer. An example would be singing the chorus from "How Great Thou Art" after you finish singing "How Great Is Our God." Another example would be singing "Because He Lives" at the end of "Mighty To Save" since the last line of "Mighty To Save" talks about Jesus' resurrection, and "Because He Lives" applies how that resurrection makes a difference in our lives. Typically the song should go straight into the tag with little or no pause so that the two seem to be one continued thought. Obviously the tag needs to be in the same key as the song you are tagging it to. Used effectively, tags can be powerful tools to help people stay connected and engaged with God throughout the set. They are also helpful in bridging generation gaps, as tagging an old hymn to a modern worship chorus can really re-engage the older generation who may have "checked out" during the previous song.

Other Elements: Besides music, you can always add other elements to your worship sets: Prayer, scripture readings, recitation of ancient Christian creeds, times for reflection, scripture posted on the screens, and even videos. Use these as you see fit to enhance the people's time of fellowship with God.



Ironing It All Out

Step #6 – PLAN THE TRANSITIONS

The final element when building a worship set is to consider all of the transitions between songs. Transitions are important because if things don't flow well, you can 'rip' people out of the moment. I try to never have 'dead silence' in between songs. I find dead silence to be abrasive and it takes me out of the worshipful atmosphere that the last song put me in. (To be fair, silence can be an effective tool if the worship leader thoughtfully leads their people to it and through it.) To keep things flowing smoothly, it is important to think of how you will transition keys, who will start each song, how the song will start, making sure that the tempo is correct, etc. One popular way to transition is to pray, but you obviously don't want to pray in between every song. It is usually good to use your prayers strategically, possibly in between songs where you need to change keys or put a capo on. It is always a good idea to keep your prayer focused around the theme of the last song that you sang, and tie it into the theme of the next song. This keeps people "on the journey" that you're trying to take them on. It also helps to keep your prayers

relatively short, since long, drawn out prayers typically cause people to disengage and allow their minds to wander. Jesus encouraged his disciples to use short, rather than lengthy prayers. There is much more to write about transitions and how to do them well (I am still learning myself), but needless to say, transitions should not be an afterthought. As the worship leader, you should think through and play through your transitions even before your rehearsal night, then work through them with your band until things feel seamless and everyone feels comfortable.



Wrapping It All Up

Well, that should be enough to get you started on your road to creating compelling and powerful worship sets. Practice makes perfect, so just keep at it and you'll begin to see growing engagement from your congregants. At this point, you've prayed, you've picked thoughtfully, and you've crafted skillfully. Now it's up to God to do the real work, the heart work. He is the one that causes His people to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. As important as it is to work hard, plan well and be prepared, it's even more important to be open to the Spirit's leading.

Ultimately, it's His church service and He will run it as He sees fit. Our job is to simply be the tour guides, taking His people on a journey and "showing off" how great our God is!

Now it's your turn. Take the knowledge from this book and apply it to your next worship set. Get out there and help your people sing!



Alex Enfiedjian Alex Enfiedjian is a worship leader, songwriter, producer, author and podcaster. He founded [Worship Ministry Training](#) to pursue his passion of helping worship leaders excel in their craft and calling! Alex is married to his lovely wife Liliya and together they have two little girls. They live in Los Angeles where he serves as Worship Pastor of Calvary Chapel South Bay.

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RELATIVE KEYS CHART:

Key of A → A, D, E

Key of B → B, E, F#

Key of C → C, F, G

Key of D → D, G, A

Key of E → E, A, B

Key of F → F, Bb, C

Key of F# → F#, B, C#

Key of G → G, C, D