



John Frederick, (PhD, St. Andrews) is assistant professor of theology and worship arts coordinator at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona. A trained musician, composer, and songwriter, he has served as worship leader at churches such as Park Street Church in Boston, and he is a coeditor of the books *Galatians and Christian Theology* and *Ecclesia and Ethics*. His original music has been featured on the soundtrack of *Yu-Gi-Oh! The Movie*, and he recorded and released the original worship album *Carmen Dei: Truth Within the Static*. John is ordained as a presbyter in the Anglican Church in North America and lives in Phoenix with his wife, Tara, and their son.

What if worship leaders were seen as both artists and theologians?

Worship in the Way of the Cross lays out a theology of worship that shows worship leaders why they are more than artists performing on stage. They are others-focused ministers of the Word of God who can lead transformative worship experiences in their churches through the modes of art, aesthetics, and sound.

In the following interview, worship leader and New Testament scholar John Frederick talks about how bringing together theology and the actual practice of leading worship can transform the church.

***Worship in the Way of the Cross* lays out a foundational theology for leading worship experiences in the church. Can you briefly outline your main ideas?**

John Frederick: The central thesis of this book is that through knowing and living out the story of Jesus Christ in life and worship, we are transformed by his love so that we might transform the world through his love. Unique among the countless other myths, tales, and narratives of this world, the gospel invites us into a way of life that is paradoxically founded upon an instrument of death, the cross. As we consider what it means to lead in worship and to encounter God through worship, we must focus on this very paradox: the one story that has the power to redeem all things, to reconcile all peoples, and to restore everlasting peace is the story of a God whose power is defined not by the terrible fierceness of a warlord or the brute force of a tyrant but by the vulnerability of a baby in a manger and the humility of a carpenter on a cross.

Worship in the way of the cross is thus much more than a style or approach to worship; it is a transformative participation in the redemptive, reconciling love of Jesus Christ.

You call this kind of worship “cruciform worship.” What does “cruciform” mean?

Frederick: To be cruciform means to be conformed to the others-centered, self-giving way of the cross—the way demonstrated by Jesus himself in his humble life and death for sinners. It means seeking not to control, manipulate, intimidate, or coerce people on the basis of one’s own skill, position, or prestige, but instead endeavoring to relinquish the desire to rule as a lord, to lay down the false security and pursuit of power, to forsake the ways of the world, and to therein discover what it means to be truly and abundantly human, for the other, through love, to the glory of God.

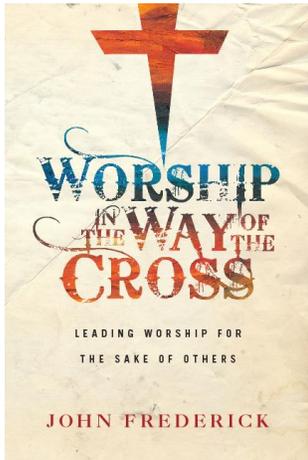
What sets *Worship in the Way of the Cross* apart from other books about leading church worship?

Frederick: While there are plenty of resources available that articulate the how-to of musical worship leading, there are surprisingly few (if any) books that engage the reader with a rich,

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Worship in the Way of the Cross: Leading Worship for the Sake of Others

Available April 2017

\$18, 208 pages, paperback

978-0-8308-4488-3

"In this readable yet theologically rich book, John Frederick sharply challenges numerous misguided contemporary understandings of worship, the church, and the Christian life. He replaces them with a vision of cross-shaped worship and its result: communities of Christlike disciples living and loving for the sake of the world. Pastors, worship leaders, and all concerned about worship need to engage this book seriously."

– Michael J. Gorman,

Raymond E. Brown Professor of Biblical Studies and Theology, St. Mary's Seminary & University

approachable, and transformative biblical theology of worship and then apply this theology to practical worship ministry in the church. This book is one small step in the task of equipping leaders of the local church to facilitate transformative, cruciform experiences through musical worship leading and pastoring.

Why is it so important for worship practice to be grounded in theology?

Frederick: The deficit of instruction on worship praxis that arises from theology can, and often does, create, cultivate, and reward a culture of musical pragmatism in the church in which the primary role and objective of the worship leader essentially amounts to performing a soundtrack corresponding to the sermon themes. This results in the aim of the musical worship becoming fixated on the provision of an emotionally moving and sometimes inadvertently manipulative religious experience for the congregant.

However, the New Testament envisions and describes worship as much more than a meeting in which we sing catchy songs with (hopefully) sound doctrinal content. The New Testament calls us to transformative experiences of worship through the communal embodiment of the love of God in Christ, which contributes to our renewal in the image of God.

What does it look like to be a leader of cruciform worship in the church?

Frederick: When God calls us to lead worship in the church, he calls us to lead not as lords but as servants. He calls us to model our motivations, actions, desires, and goals after the cruciform love of Jesus Christ.

Does this vision characterize my own current experience in leading worship in the church or the experiences of my colleagues? I would hasten to say, with humility, no. But what if we could disciple generations of worship pastors to be cruciform leaders who disciple cruciform disciples and minister to the church in ways that help to transform the people of God? What if worship pastors, who exercise a great degree of theological and spiritual influence over the church, would cease to view themselves and cease to be viewed by the congregation as artists as opposed of theologians? What if they were viewed instead as artistic theologians?

This is already happening in many of our churches – and praise God! My prayer and hope is rooted in the continued cultivation and proliferation of a global, ecclesial culture of cruciform worship that leads to cruciform, Christlike character in all of the congregants of the church.