

## **One Woman of Worship**

Carol McGuirk, Women's Ministry Leader  
Paris, France

“The Battle Hymn of the Republic”, “Onward Christian Soldiers”, “His Eye is on the Sparrow, and “America, The Beautiful”: what do all of these famous hymns have in common? Women wrote all of them. History is full of women who gave their hearts and talents to God in worship.

Miriam wrote the first psalm recorded in scripture, a song of praise to her God. With a tambourine in hand, she led the women of Israel in a dance of praise while singing praises to her great God for his divine deliverance. Deborah, a prophetess and a judge, inspired the men of Israel to fight for the Lord in battle against Sisera and Jabin's army. After leading the Israelite army in victory alongside Barak, together Deborah and Barak worshiped and praised the Lord their God in a song detailing God's victory. Hannah and Mary wrote beautiful songs of gratitude and praise to their heavenly Father, both recorded in scripture. These women along with many others are examples to us today of women who worshipped God in song and dance, and who led others to do the same.

The first song I ever learned to sing about Jesus was written by a woman: “Jesus Loves Me”, by Anna B. Warner. It is such a simple song, with such a powerful gospel message. Jesus loves me! My love for music has been with me my whole life. Singing, songwriting and praising God are an important part of my own personal worship. The McGuirk family has a habit of bursting out into song especially when we are happy. Amazingly, 9 out of 10 times the song is a church song. Oh how I love to hear my grown children praising God. Sometimes it is my oldest son bolting out “I Hear God Singing to Me”. Other times I might hear my daughter listening to and singing “Hello Lord” by Sara Groves, as she works things out with the Lord. Sometimes we all join in as one of us begins to sing “Encourage My Soul” blending together as one voice in four-part harmony. I am especially moved when my children sing the songs I sang to them growing up as I tucked them into their beds at night, songs like “All to Jesus, I Surrender”, or “Jesus is Lord”, and I am reminded by God, that I did do some things right in my parenting: I taught my children to worship God in song.

I am known by many to be a passionate woman. Like many of my sisters, I feel things deeply. My heart is easily moved. It is a wonderful thing if I am moved to do what is good and right. It is another thing altogether if I choose to react to an insult in self-pity or pride. My emotional nature is my blessing and my curse. I am grateful for how God created me, even though I wish at times I were more like my husband who thinks more with his head. At times my heart is hardened by sin and its deceitfulness, and I lose that deep connection to God and others. Sometimes music is the only thing that can reach my hardened heart and restore its tenderness and compassion once again. Like a chisel in the hand of God a meaningful song can chip away the rough and hardened edges, brought on by my

sinful thoughts and desires. It can move me to tears and to repentance. Worshiping God in song and praise can transport me directly to the throne of God, causing me to fall on my knees trembling before his holiness. ". Psalm 96: 9 tells us to "Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him all the earth." I have been filled with a deep abiding joy, one only God and I have shared, while listening to the South Central Mass Choir and Angela Headley sing their version of "Lord, You're Holy". I may have come to Church full of worry, or numbed by the events of the week gone by, but with a desire to worship and a prayerful heart, a song can restore my soul. Worship changes my perspective, restoring my view of God, removing any infestation of doubt, and filling my soul with the hope of the Gospel. I need to worship. At times I need music to worship. God demands it, He desires it, but I desperately need it. What is worship and what is my role, as a woman in worship to her God? In the back of my NIV Bible the definition for worship is "To give praise, honor and respect to God." My brother-in-law Steve Shoff used to say to his young children, "Let's give honor and respect to God" whenever he corrected them. He was teaching them to worship their God through an attitude of righteous obedience. The Bible doesn't give different directives to men or women when it comes to personal worship. We are all called to worship: men, women, and children. We are called to give him honor and respect.

*"Through Jesus let us offer to God a sacrifice of praise-the fruit of lips that confess his name". Hebrews 13:15*

*"I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips." Psalms 34:1*

God desires us to praise him, to acknowledge who He is really is and to proclaim it with our lips! In other words, he wants us to talk about Him, even to shout about Him! My God is GREAT!

*"Come let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song." Psalm 95:1-2.*

Singing is one of the many ways we can worship Him.

*"It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning, and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp." Psalm 92:1-2.*

We are to do that Sunday morning before we meet together for community worship, during our worship together and throughout the week. Worship is a universal need and requirement of all God's people. Over the years, I have had the blessing of leading in the worship ministry. Not just part singing, although that is a form of leading, but actually being the one in charge. Being a woman and

leading with brothers has presented me with some unique challenges, yet these challenges, though at times fraught with controversy and insecurity, have been great avenues of personal growth. I have been called to lead at times like Deborah, when there wasn't a brother available to do so, and I have led under the spiritual direction of some amazing brothers. I am grateful for all these experiences and more.

My love for music has also been one of God's greatest tools for refining my heart and character. I started singing for the church as a young Christian, first with the Freedom Singers in Boston and on occasion for a special event. My heart was quickly revealed to me. Singing before the church was more about me than about God. I wanted the praise. My insecurities raged inside of me and I realized that I needed to not sing before the church. I didn't sing publicly for several years. I didn't let anyone know about my past as a lead vocalist in several bands in college, or any competitions I had won. I prayed that God would teach me to sing for Him and only for Him. I asked Him to not let me sing until He thought I was ready. In 1986 I married the man of my life, and shortly thereafter we entered into the full time ministry. John and I moved to Paris in 1987. The church was small, and lacking in musical talent, and so the call came. Suddenly, I was singing at Women's Days and conferences. The battle wasn't over. Each time I was asked to sing or organize the music program I had to go to God. "God, Let this be about you, and only you. Take me out of the picture. Let me be a vessel. Use me to reach hearts for you." It is always clear to me when I am there, in that sweet place of doing it for Him and Him only. I am serene, and focused on God and others. I sing with my heart, soul, mind and strength. It is also clear when it is not about Him. I get nervous and worry about making mistakes. I worry about what others think. Yet when in that sweet place of surrender, God, somehow in his infinite wisdom and power, makes us all better at what we do for Him and He is glorified through our worship of Him. He makes us better.

I have often, by default, been in charge of organizing the music portion of a New England Conference, or our local worship. My responsibility was pulling together musicians, and singers, selecting songs, and working with the evangelists in hopes of putting together a meaningful time of worship for the body of Christ. I found it humorous that God would choose me, when others were clearly more talented, both musically and organizationally. I can also have the reputation of being a strong, opinionated woman. Some have found me to be intimidating. I know my friends and husband would agree with this assessment of me, although they might also agree I am growing. It has been my personal battle with the Lord to develop a gentler and more tranquil spirit, to show love and respect to my brothers. I have learned from the spirit of Deborah in Judges Chapter 5 to see myself more as a mother, to encourage and protect the brothers I work with, to support them with my skills and abilities and to be a joy to them, as all of us should strive to be for those who lead us. Even when the bulk of the responsibility is mine, the glory is God's and his glory is best achieved when all the parts of the body are using their gifts in praise to Him. It has been my role to show respect to my brothers, to be supportive of them and to encourage them to take on the more

visible roles of leadership. Women need love, men need respect, and in both cases it is best when it comes to us unconditionally. Being married for almost 25 years has taught me that. I am called to respect my husband all the time, because he is my husband. It is not subject to performance or merit. I came to truly grasp this need when I compared it to my own deep need for love. I don't want John to love me when I deserve it, or when I am acting in a loving manner. I want him, no I need him, to love me when I am an emotional, irritating mess! It is such a joy to give this kind of love and respect to others. I know it honors my God when I treat a brother, who may doubt his gift or ability to lead, or is still developing this gift, with great respect. When I encourage him and support him, I am strengthening the body of Christ. It is a blessing to me. To then see that brother take on the mantle of leadership, allowing me to slip back into my role of support, or of leading the women, fills me heart with joy.

How and where can women serve in the worship ministry? Anywhere really, whether up front as a part of the Praise Team, leading the women's parts, song leading during a women's worship service, or singing in the choir. This is where I love to serve, singing with the praise team. It is a wonderful time of fellowship. Our relationships strengthen the church as we perfect our skills during practice and rehearsals.

I also love to write meaningful songs and sing them for the church. Some of them are on my CD "Safe Again". I have written a few congregational songs as well such as "As for Me and My House". Hearing how one of my songs, inspired, moved, motivated or ministered to someone is so humbling and yet so rewarding. I think it is that way whenever we use our talents to edify the church. What about those of you who write poetry? Maybe you have written a poem that can be put to music, or it could be read between worship songs on a Sunday morning or at outreach coffee house. Women who play an instrument can help with the church band and special events, or accompanying a soloist. We are blessed by the women who help behind the scenes with sound and stage, video projection, filming, photography, and editing. Others with a love for music and worship use their organizational skills in the planning of major events or assist the Worship Leader of a local congregation. Dancing and choreography are yet other avenues to serve and build up the church. Sometimes we need people skilled in costume design and production, makeup and hair. I could go on and on. The point is if you have an interest in worship chances are there are ways for you to serve in this ministry even if you can't hold a tune.

I would like to mention one side note for those who serve in a more visible role. The Bible speaks about women and modesty in 1 Peter 3. Obviously, whether we are on stage or not, as Christian women we should consider how we dress. Our clothing can be current and fashionable, but never too tight or revealing. Nor should our apparel draw too much attention to us and distract the congregation from its worship. For example, wearing extremely outdated or overly casual clothing can be distracting to others as well. If we are striving to be excellent in this area, I strongly suggest getting some input on your wardrobe from a few

sisters you can trust to be truly honest with you. It is far better to get advice when in doubt, then to have someone inform you that your attire was inappropriate. If you are in front of the congregation in any capacity, consider how you dress. Remember we are up front to lead people in worship. Let our clothing choices show honor and respect to God.

Finally, whatever we do we should do it wholeheartedly and with excellence. Preparation and planning are vital to great times of worship with the church. God should get our best effort. Preparation frees us up to personally enjoy the worship time instead of worrying about singing the right words or playing the right notes. For example, if I am on the praise team, I should do my best to know my voice part and the lyrics by heart. I am then freed up to give to the congregation and to truly focus on praising God. It is obvious to the congregation when we are anxious or fearful. They can read our faces and it can then hinder their worship. They get uncomfortable for us!!! It is even more painful to be that person! I know I have been there! I can remember forgetting the words to a song during a conference solo. I had to restart twice! Talk about embarrassing. Coming prepared helps us to be surrendered and allows us to focus on what is important.

All of this being said, God is most concerned about our hearts. We will most certainly make mistakes, miss notes, forget to plan something and have to pull things together last minute, but when we are Christ-centered and trusting in Him, he makes it heavenly! When it doesn't go well, I have decided to embrace God's mercy and strive to learn from my mistakes and to make progress for the next time. There is a peace that passes understanding when we decide to let go and let God. I can recall countless times when, we were clearly under-prepared, and yet completely surrendered. I find it extremely helpful to pray every time I sing before the church, as a group and individually to surrender it all to God, to give my whole mind and heart to Him, to find peace in Him, to sing for Him, and to trust in Him. I believe God blesses a heart ready to worship and makes us sound heavenly. I am only one woman who loves to worship the Lord, and who desires to serve her great God in this ministry. I know of many others who do as well. They sing with the praise team, play with the band, work the audio-visual equipment and help organize major conferences behind the scenes. Yet, I long to see more of my sisters in Christ, sisters of all ages, rise to the challenge of penning their love for God in song, using their gifts in all aspects of worship, whether up front or back stage, and allowing God to form more of Christ in them. Fruitful service, glorious worship: may we experience both as we strive to use all our talents for the one who gave them to us in the first place.