

# Godspell: Casting the Vision with Rick Muchow

by Scott A. Shuford

There's no better place to start than at the beginning! Born in San Pedro, California in 1957, Rick Muchow and his mother moved to the famous artistic community of Greenwich Village in New York City when Rick was age six. It was here that his creative talents began to bloom. At age thirteen, Rick moved to Arizona and then to Northern California where he pursued creative arts particularly his passion for musical theater. It was his love for musical theater that God used to lead Rick to Jesus. As a high school senior, he was performing in *Godspell* when a friend (Dave Auda, now a pastor at Mosaic) explained to him the meaning behind the musical. Rick became a Christian that same year.

Rick's attitude toward music was one of the first areas of his life that God began to change. Music was his life at the time. All of that changed when his guitar was stolen during the summer after he accepted Jesus. For the first time Rick realized that life was more than music. In retrospect, losing his guitar was one of the best things that could have happened to him. Rick remembers: "Music was a god I worshiped, but now music is a means to worship God."

## Fast Forward: Easter 2008

We rejoin Rick Muchow at Saddleback Church, founded by Senior Pastor Rick Warren, author of the *Purpose Driven Life*. Sharing the stage with Warren, we find Rick bearing the fruit of the planned 31 Easter services including a tech team that serviced 73 different ministries across 4 church campuses. By the end of Easter, after laying the foundation for all of these services, 40,000 people will have attended, 150 baptisms will have taken place, and 1000 decisions for Christ. Rick will have personally led the music at 12 of those services.

## Same As It Ever Was?

It hasn't always been this way. Rick has had to continually change, adapt and stretch having served for two and a half years as the part time youth and music leader at a small church of 60-100 attendees, then as a full time worship leader for four and half years at a church of just under 3000 attendees before spending these last 20 years at Saddleback helping it grow to 20,000+ attendees.

## What's In A Name?

Rick is a man with many titles. As Saddleback's Worship Pastor, on an average weekend Rick is responsible for the Worship Arts Team; a total of 1500 volunteers including the Creative Arts, Tech Arts and Worship Leadership teams that will support the worship services in 11 venues across the main Saddleback campus and 3 regional campuses. Yes, that's 11 different music programs each weekend. Add in weekly rehearsals, the Night of Worship (a monthly two night special service,) and one weekend off each month, and everyone would find themselves a little busy. Worship Pastor is one title. Let's add a few more: Elder of the Church, Executive Management Team member, Executive Leadership Team member.. All of those things are true, but none of them truly define Rick Muchow.

## Servantman!

From what I've seen, the title that best fits Rick is Servant. I realize that sounds a bit cliché or Christianese to say, and that's a shame especially in this case. We toss around the word servant a

lot in the church, but Rick Muchow is an incarnation of what it means to be a servant. Hidden under his shirt, he really could have a giant "S" emblazoned across his chest. When you see this man standing alongside Rick Warren beaming across the world over satellite while leading the nation of Rwanda in worship, it is easy to imagine that this artist might have a demanding attitude, perhaps with a small case of "prima donna" or at the least a projection of superior experience. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. He will not show you the "S" on his chest, but you will experience it.

It is not uncommon for we as worship leaders to see our role as the leader of the "worship" portion of the church service. We see our Senior Pastor as in control of the teaching and ourselves in control of the worship. Not so with Rick Muchow. "My job is to support my Pastor and his philosophy of ministry. God has gifted me with the ability to interpret the speaker's vision in the language of the creative arts. My role is to help take the message from the head and put it into the heart." For Rick, that is the power of music, tech arts and the creative arts. "I don't view my role as a

lesser role, but as a vital role in the life of the church, fulfilling the vision and goals of my pastor and teams." Rick is there to drive his pastor's message into the hearts of the congregation. "People don't remember sermons. They remember moments. Creative Arts is one of the best ways that the Holy Spirit uses to create a 'moment;' that experience frozen in time that a person will remember for the rest of their lifetime."

**"More Than Music, We're A Family"**

That's the slogan for the Worship Arts Team at Saddleback. The key is building relationships. Rick says that the servant attitude is not only important for him with his Senior Pastor, but even more so with the volunteers he and his team lead in the ministry. "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Sometimes we (worship leaders) forget that it is a worship service that we are leading and not a worship 'serve us.'"

Rick confesses that an area he is growing in is allowing other people to lead the ministry. That sounds kind of funny to hear him say in light of the sheer size and scope of what gets done every week at Saddleback's campuses. It's a humbling thought for me in my own situation to think that this man who so obviously can't do it all himself still feels like he is being stretched in this way. He clarifies, "An open hand philosophy rather than a closed grip philosophy requires a lot of faith: in God and in people. As the ministry grows, I think it's the only healthy way to lead."

**Encouraging Music!**

With a launching point like Saddleback, Rick certainly has had the opportunity to "hit the road" as they say, but his heart has always been to be a local pastor. While he does literally tour the world alongside Rick Warren, Rick Muchow's call to serve led him to found Encouraging Music rather than pursue an artist career. "It's hard now to imagine, but 20 years ago, not every church had a 'rock' band to accompany their worship. Finding songs and charts was very difficult. It was easier to write them myself," and write he did! Encouraging Music was created not as a music label designed to produce CDs (dare I say tapes or even r e c o r d s?) but as a publisher of music resources. "Encouraging Music's commitment has been to resource the church with songs that are in a seeker friendly language and contemporary sound, supplying full orchestrations, charts, lead sheets, lyrics, accompaniment tracks."

As Saddleback grew and grew and grew, Rick established relationships with

creative arts directors around the world. Many were facing the same issues and had the same questions Rick had along the way. In hindsight, it appears that Rick was placed just slightly ahead on the learning curve. "Saddleback was growing so quickly, we just had to figure things out. We learned a lot about things that didn't work, and things that did." Seven years ago, this ongoing flow of questions led Rick to start a column called Ask Rick Muchow where pastors from around the world email in their questions, and Rick answers two every month. "Ask Rick Muchow" has grown to syndication in leading publications both in print and on the web. Many additional contributed articles followed. The culmination of this teaching and encouragement is the annual Saddleback Worship Conference & Festival, celebrating its 7<sup>th</sup> year this year. For Rick, the event is one of the highpoints he looks forward to every year. "With 2500-3000 worship leaders and team members gathered here for four days of general sessions, workshops, skill building, song and resource sharing, and concerts there is a lot of fun, inspiration, and encouragement, and wonderful times of deep, corporate worship."

**Practical Theology?**

Don't groan. I can already hear you saying "oxymoron?" After 20 years of leading worship, Rick began a personal rediscovery of what he knew about the theology of worship and how it related to the church in practical ways. This two year study process became *The Worship Answer Book*, published by Thomas Nelson's J. Countryman imprint. With those 20 years of experience, the book was an "overnight success" with worship leaders and their teams as well as with colleges and seminaries. "It's surprising how many of us know how to worship, but we know very little about what the Bible says about worship." Rick seemed surprised for himself too. "Writing *The Worship Answer Book* was one of the best experiences of my Christian life. I hope people continue to read the book because of the depth of Scriptures combined with practical explanations and ideas."

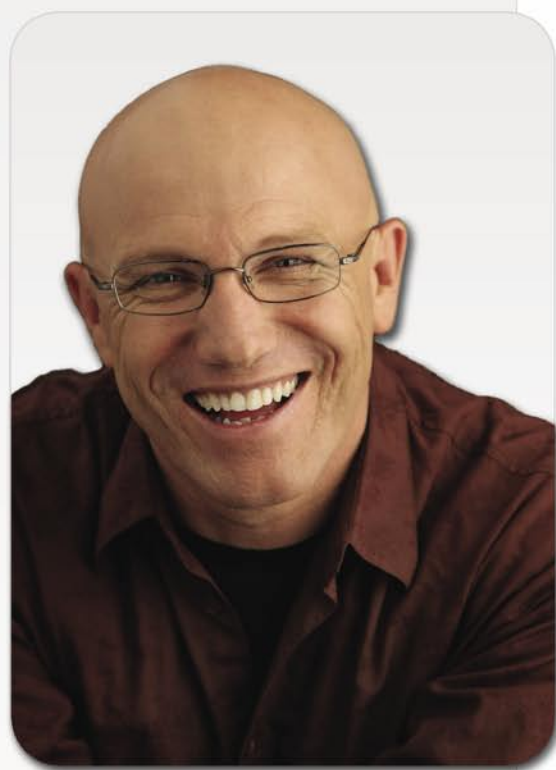
In writing the book, as the words flowed through Rick's pen to the paper over that period (ok, it was more likely through his fingers to his keyboard,) he finds himself now going back to the book to reconnect with what God was and is continuing to teach him, taking him more deeply into his own personal relationship as a worshipper. An easy read, I can understand why the book has had this impact.

**Sounds of Saddleback**

With all this conversation about logistics, leadership and Scripture logic, it seems like Rick could be more manager than musician, until you get him to start talking about songs. Somehow in the midst of all that has gone on at Saddleback, Rick has also released 12 albums of songs and related resources.

A personal favorite of mine is the song "Fall On Me" from the All About Love project. A pure, simple and heartfelt song, calling to the "Spirit of peace, Sent by the Father's hand. Change my life with Your presence. Make me whole."

When asked to share some key memories or stories from his own song writing, Rick has several:

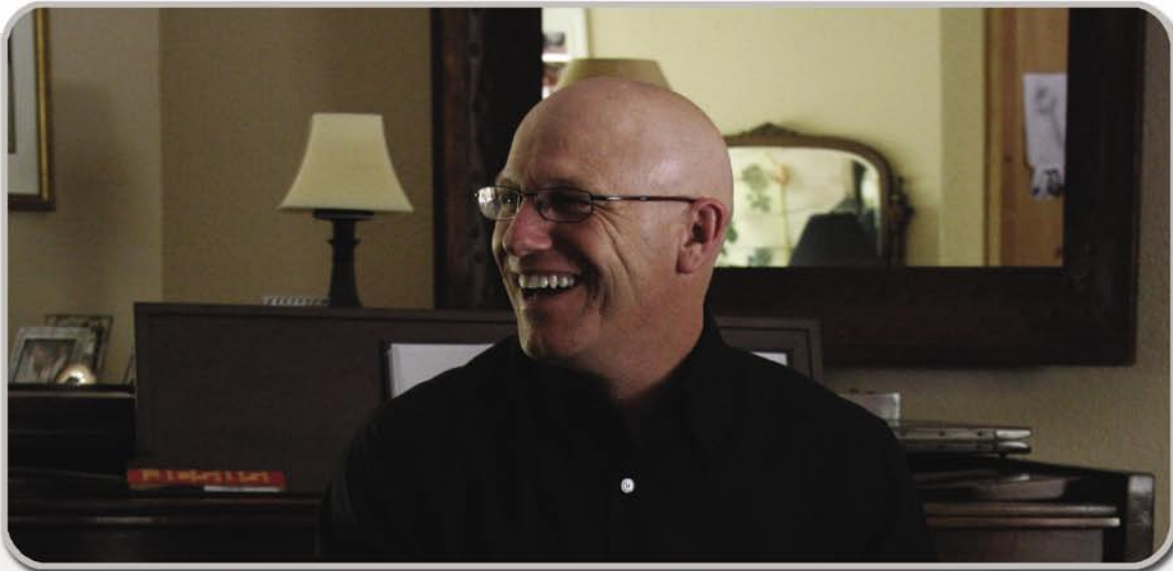


"Depend Upon His Love" (from Promises, 1985)

One of the first "faith break-through songs" he wrote was 1979's "Depend Upon His Love." "This was one of the first times I'd written an honest expression of how God was dealing with my life." This is the equivalent of his first love, in terms of a song.

"Healing Grace" (from Healing Grace, 1998)

This song has one of Rick's favorite lines, "When I thought my life was over, You were waiting there for me" and a line he borrowed from A.W. Tozer, "now I can see that there are good things only suffering



can bring." The song was written during a time when Rick and his wife were dealing with a congenital heart defect that their third son was born with. "We weren't sure he would survive." At the same time, Rick's mother was in a battle with lung cancer that eventually took her life.

"The Greatest Mystery" (from Into Your Arms, 2002)

This song was written with Rick Warren, specifically for an Easter service. "I think it speaks directly, honestly to an unchurched person about the importance of finding significance and meaning in life. I remember singing this song and having the overwhelming sense that many people at the services were finding Christ." Rick says he's partial to congregational songs, but is quick to point out that this is not a congregational song.

"He Arose" (from The Songs Of Saddleback, 1992)

An interesting thing happened at Easter, "One of my favorite experiences in leading a new song that I'd written was at this Easter Service, back when Saddleback still met at the high school. I remember singing the lyrics 'I can feel the earth still shakin'. Every morning I awaken. To the resurrection of God's Son.' And while we were singing, California experienced an earthquake of noticeable magnitude. Many people asked me after the service, 'how did you create that special effect?'"

"Trust God" (from iBelieve & rerecorded for new 2008 CD - More Than Music)

"One song that I keep coming back to is 'Trust God.' The song is based on Proverbs 3:5 and Proverbs 16:3. It reminds me to keep trusting God in everything you do and to not try to figure out everything on my own. This principle is essential for Christians and especially ministry leaders to practice."

The rest of 2008 looks to be a busy year for Rick Muchow:

- A new recording and resources collection is due out in Summer 2008.
- The worship center at Saddleback is going through a sound and video upgrade.
- Rick is working on a Worship Night format based on the *Purpose Driven Life* that can be used as an introduction or campaign celebration by churches doing the 40 Days of Purpose campaign.
- Saddleback and New York City are preparing for a city-wide 40 Days of Purpose campaign in September 2008. (Orlando, FL, and the country of Rwanda have both done this 40 Days campaign previously.)
- A Hispanic Worship Festival is being planned to take place in Orange County, CA.

### Curtain Call

I asked Rick, "What is most important to you? What should a worship leader or team member absolutely, positively know and act on? His answer: "The importance of trusting God, to make the time for me to invest in my spiritual growth especially as it pertains to my personal relationship to Jesus - NOT my vocation. There is a difference. Everyone knows that just because you serve or work at a church, it doesn't mean you have a healthy relationship with God. Service is not a substitute for the relationship with Christ. Remember, Jesus wants a relationship with you, not just your hard work. Proverbs 3 is famous for admonishing us to trust in the Lord with all of our heart. One benefit to trusting God is that He will make our paths straight, which means that as we trust in God, repent of our sins, grow in our relationship with him and with others, rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to empower ministry, God can do much more than anything we could ever ask or imagine through our lives.

Can I get an "Amen!"



Scott A. Shuford is a Founding Partner at White Barn Group, a full service Branding, Advertising & Interactive agency whose portfolio includes work for IHOP, Toyota, and African Child Foundation; and the CEO of FrontGate Media, serving companies as their "Gateway to the Christian Audience" through one of the largest families of Christian entertainment media in the world.