

**TO THE PASTORAL STAFF AND THOSE WHO LABOR EVERY SUNDAY TO HELP
THE CONGREGATION WORSHIP GOD.**

“Why do we need this manual?” you might ask. “After all, we’ve been doing just fine—people like the songs we sing, people like our sermons, we’re holding steady. We’ve made adjustments in our music style to incorporate the younger generation, we even have drama!”

All these things are great—excellent elements to have. But take a look around outside the church. Is your community any better off because of the church’s presence? Are a greater percentage of Americans committed Christians now than 20 years ago? Are church-going Christians as a whole much different from the world they live in? Divorce rates are up, domestic abuse and substance abuse are in the church, people church-hop looking for a “better” Sunday experience. Islam and Hinduism are faster growing religions in the U.S. than Christianity. How many people in your congregation come on Sunday because they can’t wait to be there, and how many come out of a sense of duty or habit? Does the non-Christian community look at your church and think, “Wow, there’s something special and different about them. They really see and experience God!” Or do they see it as a social club, or a boring, irrelevant waste of time?

These are hard questions and, perhaps, offensive statements. But I think it’s time that we take a hard look at what the church is all about. The last two decades have seen the church jump on many bandwagons and try many models: The Willow Creek Model, Evangelism Explosion, Hillsong, blended worship models, etc. We think that putting that model into place in our church will help the church grow—and maybe it does, for a while. But what kind of growth is it? John Piper states that “missions exists because worship doesn’t.” We agree that the goal of the church is to help make worshipers of God out of the people of the world. Jesus commanded us to “make disciples of all nations” — not Sunday service attenders, or people who “prayed the prayer.”

The greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all of ourselves—our hearts, minds, will, strength, emotion. We are to respond to God as He reveals himself to us, just as Isaiah responded each time God revealed Himself to him.

It takes more than applying the latest model to grow a healthy church. There is no one thing that will help. Research has shown that a healthy church focuses on eight characteristics: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry (Christians serving in the area of their giftedness), passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship service, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism and loving relationships. All eight must be in action for the church to be growing.¹

It is not our purpose here to go into all eight characteristics, although we believe that they are all important. Our heart lies in worship, and the lack of information about simple things that can make the difference between a frustrated congregation and one that is growing in a sense of dwelling in the presence of God. Here, for your consideration, is a guidebook for the journey that is worship.

¹ Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996).

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR BIBLICAL, CULTURAL, CREATIVE WORSHIP

Worship is not a commodity. We should not be looking to do worship “right” in order to get the “right” response from people and so grow the church. We should be worshiping because God is worthy of worship! “What a wonderful time of worship!” we might say as we leave a Sunday morning service. Does this mean, “How good I felt while singing or praising God”? Or is it saying, “I was in the presence of God”? What does it mean to be in the presence of God? It is something that is emotionally impacting AND when some truth about God is revealed that is real to the individual worshipped.

In targeting certain communities (e.g. GenX, Baby Boomer, etc.) are we just falling into a marketing trap? What will get the most number of these people into the church because of the “worship” time). There are people that will come to get a “worship” (or singing or emotional) fix, but have not yielded completely to God. Our services are often geared toward giving people fixes, not helping them worship. Has worship happened if people are emotionally satisfied, or if they are touched by a sermon? What about the rest of the time?

It is a fine line that leaders of worship have to draw. Many leaders are indeed worshiping in what they do, the songs they choose, what they want for the congregation. But the leader has a greater responsibility to see that attitude replicated in the hearts, minds and actions of the congregation; and that is often where these guidelines can help.

I. FOUNDATIONS

Question for Discussion

- write down your definition of worship.

1. What is biblical worship?

Evangelicals tend to view worship as only singing. “They left during the prayer time but came back for the worship.” The “worship time” is often just a song set, maybe with Scripture thrown in with musical background, and a short prayer. All this is merely a lead-up to the main event—the sermon. Is this really worship? Let’s look at what Scripture has to say.

Definitions

Worship is— our Christian lives. It is our response to God. Rom. 12:1-2 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” David also said, “Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord,” (Ps. 89:15) Worship is lifestyle, daily activity.

Worship is involvement. The very act of worship demands involvement—without involvement, there is no worship, only spectators to a show. Worship is a verb—for it to happen means action on the part of the worshipped, not an observation of a performance. Involvement is seen in the very nature of the words used: to bow down, to do homage, to kiss toward, to serve, to confess sin, to sing, shout, clap, bring an offering. (Rev 4:11, 5:12, Gen. 18:2, Ps. 100:2, Is. 19:21, Jn. 4:21-24, Matt. 18:26, Rev. 13:4, Matt. 4:10, Heb. 9:9, 14, Rev. 22:3.)

When true involvement is happening, wonderful results follow. As we spend time in God’s

presence, nearness is fostered; we gain knowledge about who God is; we become vulnerable, risking rejection and allowing ourselves to become known; and we continue interaction as we participate in an ongoing dialogue of words and deeds. We submit ourselves to God’s authority.

Hendricks [William Hendricks, *Exit Interviews*] summarizes the view of many worship dropouts: “Perhaps the most common complaint was the worship services were boring. It was not just that these gatherings were not interesting; they were not worshipful. They did little to help people meet God. However, I did not hear this as a call for more entertainment, but for more participation.”

Worship services that are not worshipful, people not meeting God, people not being allowed to participate in a worship relationship with God—it is as if the very essence of worship has been quietly removed. ... The most significant benefit of a worship service is connecting with God. It does not matter how chatty and interesting the celebrity interviews, how captivating the drama, how stunning the soloist, or how relevant the message. When personal interaction with God is absent, church loses much of its appeal.²

Worship is whole-hearted and totally focused. Ps. 27:4, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.” Likewise, the command given to us by Jesus in Matt. 22:37 is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.” Also Deut. 6:5 “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

Worship is communication, not transmission. Communication is key, not transmission. In other words, it is a process. Transmission merely sends facts from giver to recipient. There is no feedback, no continual cycle of learning, no communication. In other words, there is no response. Our sermons often fall into this category—they are excellent vehicles of factual information, and contain many life-changing truths, but they are presented in a way that limits participation and response from the congregation and so it is too easy for the information to “go in one ear and out the other!” The ultimate communication is God revealing Himself to us and

² Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 23.

us responding to the revelation.

Worship is delight, not duty. John Piper points out that coming to see someone out of pleasure confers honor on that person. He says:

When someone delights in you, you feel honored. When someone finds happiness in being around you, you feel treasured, appreciated, glorified. It is a loving thing to visit the

sick because it makes you glad to be there.

This then is the answer to why God is not unloving to magnify his glory. God is glorified precisely when we are satisfied in him—when we delight in his presence, when we like to be around him, when we treasure his fellowship.³

Worship witnesses. Ps. 57:9 “I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples.” The Lord is to be declared and praised everywhere. The church’s function is worship: Acts 2:42-47 says the church met daily, praising God. 1 Peter 2:4-5 says, “you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. .. That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”⁴

Worship sacrifices. It is an action and a giving of something which costs. “Present our bodies, a holy and living sacrifice” — it is not easy to keep thoughts pure, the tongue from not gossiping, the heart from being critical, exercising, eating right, abstaining from sexual immorality and substance abuse. It is not easy to give our whole selves to God in service and servitude, putting Him first rather than our desires or wants. Yet that is sacrifice, and it is pleasing to God.

Worship remembers Jesus Christ. Without Christ, our worship becomes no different from any

³ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 27.

⁴ A summary of Morgenthaler’s definition.

other religion. Christ is our distinguishing mark and the reason we can worship. We celebrate, as the early Church did, the God made known to us in Jesus Christ.

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Heb. 10:25)

We are told to meet together

- to fully realize the benefits of the new relationship with God made possible by Christ
- because we need to express our faith continually as an ongoing relationship
- to fully understand what has been done

This leads us to the second question.

2. What is a worship service?

Question for Discussion

- write down your definition of a worship service.

It is a celebration of the personal worship that has gone on during the week.

bc cumings expresses it well when he talks about the “streams of worship.” As people worship individually at home it’s like a creek; worshiping with family becomes a stream. The larger the group, the larger the body of water. As a church together on Sunday, fueled by our worship of the week, we become a raging river. If our lives do not reflect worship during the week, when we come together, what do we have?

It is a “rehearsal for life.” (Gordon Borrer)

A weekly corporate time of worship enables personal worship during the week. It is a time to provide “food for thought,” new reflections about God, challenges for our lives, reminders of God’s work in our lives. It is a time to make a connection between our lives and what happens in

worship.

It is a time to declare what God has done. It is a celebration of God.

Old Testament worship placed a great deal of emphasis on declaring, in the context of the assembly, what God had done in the life of Israel and its individuals.

It is a time to increase commitment.

Communication increases commitment. The more a person communicates publicly a belief, the more committed they become to that belief. Therefore, the more we increase participation (i.e., the more people get involved), the greater the commitment of the congregation will be to the message.

Worship, then, involves every part of our being. It is the sum of many parts, both in ourselves and in our actions privately and corporately. The goals of worship are: 1) an expression of our love for God with all our heart, mind and strength (Mark 12:30), and 2) a celebration of God's saving deed in Christ (Heb. 10:19-22).

Worship is the believer's response of all that he is—mind, emotions, will, and body—to all that God is and says and does. This response has its mystical side in subjective experience, and its practical side in objective obedience to God's revealed truth. It is a loving response that is balanced by the fear of the Lord, and it is a deepening response as the believer comes to know God better.⁵

Application

- how many people in the church can accurately define what worship is? (as seen here)
- find out what reasons your people have for coming to a corporate worship service.
- think about ways to bring about a fuller understanding of worship in your church.

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1990), 27.

3. Biblical Examples of Worship⁶

A. 1 Chronicles 16:8-36

This is a wonderful passage that shows the progression of a worship service, written by King David to celebrate the installation of the ark of the Lord. It takes place in the context of celebration and thanksgiving, following offerings and gift-giving (1 Chr. 15:28-16:6). Here we see the journey of coming into God's presence as well as a wide range of emotions and attitudes, such as thanksgiving, praise, humbleness, repentance, reverence and exuberance.

This passage can be likened to a journey into the presence of the king. Imagine, if you will, a man (or woman) starting on a road, setting off to the capital city. As he starts, he begins to think of the things he knows about the king—like the things he has done for his people and for him personally. As he continues to walk and remember, he is quite taken up by the memory, looking at those events which sealed the covenant between the king and his people. As he approaches the city, he begins to declare aloud the wonders of the king. First, he enters the city gate, and then he continues on the road to the palace itself. All this time there is a sense of anticipation, of building excitement. Finally, he gets to the palace and is ushered into the throne itself. At this point, he is no longer talking about the king as he remembers and has heard. He now sees him in all his glory and splendor:

Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy in his dwelling place.
Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength,
ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name.

Upon seeing him in all his majesty, he is in awe, speechless. He trembles as he begins to approach the throne, carrying with him an offering precious to him. He feels so small, so insignificant.

Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.
Tremble before him, all the earth!

⁶ This section is written by Bill Rowe, based on his studies of worship.

He bows before the king and his offering is accepted. He stays in the throne room for what seems like a timeless period. Once he leaves, the nature of his praise changes because he was in the king's presence. He celebrates with passion and exuberance. He is changed by the time in the throne room, recognizing the need for repentance.

Cry out, "Save us, O God our Savior; gather us and deliver us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name, that we may glory in your praise."

He then accepts the king's forgiveness and gives thanks.

Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.

And, finally, there is a unified response from all the people who have been on the journey with him, or who are collected to praise the king.

Then all the people said "Amen" and "Praise the LORD."

B. Isaiah 6

This chapter is a powerful depiction of the cycle of revelation and response. Every time God spoke or acted, Isaiah responded.

The setting in the first verse of chapter 6 is significant because it is much more than a historical reference. 2 Chronicles 26:16ff tells of a prideful man, King Uzziah, who insisted on worshipping in a way which was against the Law, and he paid the price. He insisted on burning incense, which was a privilege that was only for the Levites. Even though the priests tried to stop him his anger burned, showing the extent of his pride. If he had repented, and humbled himself then, would he have been made leprous? Yet as his anger burned, God judged him immediately and he became a leper.

In the picture of Isaiah, we see a very different picture. Against this backdrop of pride and

exulting in earthly power and pushing self forward, we see Isaiah. Isaiah has a vision of the glory of God in His throne room. God's glory is something that He chooses to show his people. It is God who is *revealing* His glory to us.

Many scripture verses attempt to describe the impact of the glory of God. The seraphs covered their faces, because they could not gaze directly at it. God manifests Himself in tremors, or smoke, or fire. Whatever the vision of God's glory was for Isaiah, his response was to cry out, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." (Is. 6:5) Who can see the living Lord and live? He is thinking "It is all over, I am a dead man." God revealed Himself to Isaiah in His glory, holiness, and power and Isaiah responded with humility. In fact, as we begin to see the glory of God we see ourselves in relation to Him and the only appropriate response is humbleness, falling on our faces before Him. Contrast this with Uzziah and how he was puffing himself up. This is the first cycle of revelation and response.

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for. (Is. 6:6-7)

It is God's turn. The coal is referring to purification. It is symbolic of Christ. It is a cleansing fire, giving the picture of burning away the 'dross' and making us pure, reminiscent of the *live coal*. Coals of fire were taken inside the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:12), when sacrifice was made to atone for sin.

To serve God, Isaiah needed to be a clean instrument. The God of burning holiness himself provides this cleansing from the sacrificial altar (Nu 31:22-23; Mal 3:2). Significantly, one of the seraphs (see comment on v. 2) is the instrument of purification administered to the prophet. Isaiah may well have learned from this experience that sinful human beings can join in the

worship of the “burning ones” only when purified by the fire of God. Passively, Isaiah responds by receiving the cleansing fire.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”
And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” (Is. 6:8)

There is one more cycle of revelation-response. God gives the call. He does not force, nor does He command, but gives the call to those who hear his voice.

This chapter has the feel of a drama. There is the inciting incident, the escalating events, crisis, and a change from one thing to another. In this case, Isaiah is changed forever and the path of his life will never be the same.

It is like a spiral that goes up and up and up. Worship is like a dialogue between you and God. He shows you something about Himself, you respond appropriately and the dialogue continues. Isaiah responded with the service of his whole life. The message he had to deliver was a difficult one, but he gave his life to that purpose.

C. John 4:24

“God is Spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” We worship because God dwells within us. When Christ’s Spirit dwells in us, we do respond appropriately. If people are being critical, is that worshipping in the Spirit? Worshipping in spirit also implies an involvement of emotions, a mysterious connection of the inner being to God. Worshipping in truth is often easier to do—knowing who you worship, and what and why. The more we understand about God, the more it affects our lives. We worship in truth when we do what God would have us do.

4. Essentials of worship

Questions for Discussion

- outline your existing worship service. What happens in each part?

In studying the Scriptures, we find the following essentials of worship:

prayer (Acts 2:42)

praise (Ps. 29:2, 96:9, 99)

teaching the Word (Acts 2:42)

confession/assurance (Is. 6)

singing (2 Chr. 29:28)

communion (Acts 2:42)

giving (Gen. 22)

fellowship (Acts 2:42)

Response (Is. 6)

Robert Webber gives a fourfold pattern for worship that is widely accepted and contributes toward growth in worship. It is best explained by his use of a dinner analogy. When you invite people to your home for dinner, you make plans for the evening and prepare the food and entertainment. At the appointed time, the guests arrive and you welcome them, invite them in and help them feel comfortable. Over hor d'oeuvres you catch up on each other's lives and begin connecting. When dinner is ready, you gather to pray and then eat together, enjoying the company, the food, the communication. After you have learned new things, or affirmed common ground, or relived past experiences, it's eventually time to go home and so you thank the guests for coming, make plans for another time, and help them to the door. Both parties go out having enjoyed the fellowship, the time of communication and time spent together. What a wonderful picture of corporate worship! It can be outlined like this:

The Gathering

The Service of the Word

The Service of the Table/Service of Praise and Thanksgiving

The Service of Dismissal

If one of these is missing, then the “evening” seems incomplete. Can you imagine being invited to dinner and not receiving food? Or seeing food on the table but never being allowed to eat it? Or never being dismissed to go home? Or never thanking your hosts for their work? Or what about never even being invited in the door to begin with?!

One final point: When evaluating your worship service look at your stated purpose. Is it what actually happens weekly? Often the functional purpose—schedules, allaying criticism, convenience of participants, time, energy and so on—supersedes the stated purpose and so the worship service looks very different than intended. The tension thus created between stated and functional purposes becomes a hindrance to worship.

Application

- what are the similarities and differences of your understanding of worship with what has been discussed here?
- what are the similarities and differences of your worship service with what you discovered in this first section?
- are your stated purpose and functional purpose the same?
- is your service missing any key structural elements? Which ones, and why?

5. Know who and what you are working with

Questions for Discussion

- what is the makeup of your congregation?
- how do they respond to change?
- what is their history, individually and corporately?

- what are their desires and needs?

“Communication is what is heard, not only what is said.”⁷ In other words, as leaders, you may think you are communicating well to the congregation, but the experiences and perspective of each congregant affects how they interpret what you say. For example, someone may complain that Scripture is never read in the services. “But that’s not true!” you respond. You may indeed read Scripture, but it is read as a transition between songs, with music playing throughout and no Scripture reference given. The person’s complaint is valid to them—they do not “hear” the Scripture because they are expecting a solemn reading that stands on its own, with appropriate references given before and/or after the reading. Neither approach is wrong, but it demonstrates the importance of knowing how your actions are perceived by the listeners.

- know your congregation, their likes, dislikes and needs
- know the history of your church, its struggles, its cultural makeup, its triumphs
- be aware of the world of your congregation
- use words and signals accurately. Make sure you are saying what you what to be saying!

Eddie Gibbs commented that the past generation was in the Age of the Orator. Now we are in the Age of the Performer. Both “ages” are merely manifestations of the cultural patterns of the time, because the cultural pattern will influence the form of the communication. Neither one reflects true worship—both are cultural manifestations. Thus, the older generation prefers oratory sermons and boomers like the performances so prevalent in churches in the 1980s. It is valid enough to use the patterns of the time, but take care! In these two examples, the focus is on performance, not on worship. In either “age” artists and preachers need to be servants first, not

⁷ Donald K. Smith, *Creating Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 65. This is his proposition 4.

stars—laying down ourselves and honestly trying to guide the congregation in all its diversity (both age and culture). Look at the Acts church—surely many generations and cultures were represented yet they worshipped as one and were a community.

The needs and experience of the congregation members affects their interpretation of the events of the service.⁸ If they have gone to church all their lives and had a 40-minute sermon each Sunday, then a sudden decrease in sermon time and increase in songs could be interpreted by them as an attempted takeover of the church by those who have no regard for the Word. The question of music style always causes heated debate. While on an ideological level, everyone can agree that the important thing is to worship God, when it comes to the tune or rhythm we hit a deeper part of our core, one that does not take its orders from our ideology! Understanding this can perhaps help us as we seek to bring unity to the type of music sung in worship to God. (This becomes, at times, a mandate of balance, balancing the ideology of your plans and intent with the personal, visceral response of the congregation.)

Application

- look at the kind of service you have. Is it in line with your congregation's profile?
- Does the music style, teaching style, etc. communicate to the congregation as a whole?

6. Clarify goals to increase communication.⁹

Questions for Discussion

- Do you have a goal for the worship service?
- What do you want to accomplish each week?
- How are you setting about obtaining it?

⁸ Smith's proposition 19.

⁹ Smith's proposition 5.

Planning is not antithetical to God! Just take a look at Romans 8:28:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Ephesians 1:11-12 also talks about God's desire for planning to achieve the best results. It could be talking about a corporate worship service!

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

A goal can be stated in the following eight terms: it is measurable, believable, achievable, desirable, conceivable, controllable, growth-directed, stated with no alternative. With that definition, you can begin to see how clarifying your goals for the corporate worship service could really make an impact on your congregation because it will help tighten, or clarify, any parts of the service that are not contributing to the goal. The individual elements, or sections, of your service may be of excellent quality and, individually, have a good flow; but if there is no overall plan, the service remains just a bunch of unconnected blocks. Specifics on how this point affects the planning of the service will be looked at in detail in a later section.

Application

- Set a goal for the next service you plan. Be specific.
- Appoint one person to oversee the whole service, tying all the parts together to help achieve the desired goal.

II. BUILDING: CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR WORSHIP

A. PREPARATION

Questions for Discussion

- Write down your preparation routine for Sunday morning. What things do you do to prepare? What things, if any, do you do with others to help them prepare?

A good preacher and a good worship leader spend time with the material for the week, interacting with it, figuring out the best way of expressing the ideas contained in Scripture, praying for the time. But there is always room for more prayer. Prayer should be the cornerstone, foundational to all we do in worship. When I perform I always commit the performance to God, praying over the details of the performance and the congregation's response and mine. How much more should we do this in leading worship!

1. Prepare the heart of the leaders/participants/team through prayer (cover the service and its details in prayer; pray for the Holy Spirit to move in the hearts of the people and the leaders).

John Killinger recounts this episode:

Several years ago I was preaching in a small Tennessee church. From the minute I entered the sanctuary, I felt a spirit there I hadn't felt in many sanctuaries. The prayers, the music, and even the silences were extraordinary. I feel sure that I preached over my head—that my own spirit was measurably quickened and deepened by the unusual sense of worship prevailing in the minister and the congregation.

Later, I commented about this to two laymen. "I hope you know," I said, "what a rare and exhilarating kind of worship you enjoy in this church."

They smiled knowingly at one another. "Have you seen The Cloisters?" one asked.... "The shed up in the woods behind the preacher's house," one of them added when he saw my perplexity. ... "That's what the preacher calls it," they said. "It's where he goes to pray. And sometimes he takes some of us there, too. He goes up there every Saturday evening to pray for our services on Sunday. His wife says sometimes he stays two or three hours."

The mystery of the great worship services suddenly evaporated.

It was not a large congregation. They had no dynamic, colorful song leader. None of the cues were evident that usually indicate an exciting, impressive service of worship. But the most important ingredient of all was present: the minister and his people were prepared spiritually to come before God.¹⁰

Jack Hayford describes his regular Saturday evening prayer time in the sanctuary, where he walks through the sanctuary, touching each chair, praying over the people who will be sitting in them the next day. He opens himself to God's presence and trusts God to be present the following day. He is open to the Spirit's leading in how he introduces his sermon the following day, what needs are pressing.

2. Share the goals of the service with the participants. It is important for everyone to know what is expected for that particular service so that they will know how their contribution fits in and prepare their hearts and minds accordingly.

3. Prepare the hearts of the congregation. Howard Stevenson, worship minister at Evangelical Free Church, has this to say:

Just before we begin worship, our people...are warmly greeting and talking to one another, both in and out of the sanctuary...Though there is organ music, it is not, as in many churches, a signal for silence in the pews. A few minutes before the stated beginning time, one of our pastoral staff comes to the platform to greet people, underscore some announcements, and then encourage people to examine the bulletin, open their hymnals, and collect their thoughts for worship. Then the organist draws a veil of quietness with thirty to forty-five seconds of musical accompaniment, perhaps employing a hymn that will be used, a related musical thought, or a short praise chorus. Then worship can begin.¹¹

¹⁰ Jack Hayford, John Killinger and Howard Stevenson, *Mastering Worship* (Portland: Multnomah, 1990), 17-18.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 30.

4. Be prepared. Know Scripture and the topic of the day, and know the ins and outs of the service and all its elements.

5. Understand that there are multiple audiences in a corporate worship service.¹²

In planning the worship service, keep in mind that *God is the audience*. We often forget this crucial fact, operating our service as if it is the weekly vehicle for dispensing advice to the congregants and getting caught up with all the news, or using it as a chance to try new music or just get the vocal chords going. If we truly believed that God is the primary audience, then our whole approach to corporate worship would change.

Having said that, there is a dichotomy that takes place during corporate worship. For the congregation, the primary audience is God. However, for the worship leader and all those on the platform leading the service, the primary audience is the congregation, with God as the secondary audience. The leaders need to focus on the congregation in order to help them focus on *their* primary audience—God. This does not mean that the leader treats the congregation as an audience for his performance; rather, the leader works in the role of a servant to guide their focus upward.

- *the congregation is the primary audience (and you're trying to lead them into God's presence)*. As a worship leader, you may be focused on God as the audience, but you still have the responsibility for leading the congregation into that mindset as well. Therefore, you must also keep them in mind with all you do. What visual cues are you giving them? Are you clear in your directions? Do they know what to expect, and what is going on? Are they focusing on God as their audience, or are they observing your private devotion to God?

- *divisions and subgroups of the congregation (high schoolers, old-timers, etc.)*. Each

¹² Smith's Proposition 7.

congregation is made up of mini-audiences, according to taste preferences, age groups, culture, education, etc. You need to be aware of each of them, understanding their worldview and what will enable them to enter into whole-hearted worship.

B. EXTERNALS

Questions for Discussion

- How are songs chosen for a corporate worship service?
- How is the order decided on?
- What does your stage set-up look like? Why are the instrumentalists and singers placed where they are?

1. The art of song leading

Even the best musician can overlook small things that help lead people into worship through the songs.

a) What is the flow of songs?

Is it natural or are you working hard to bring it all together? Evaluate the songs you're going to sing. Know what your congregation can handle and what kind of songs are helping them worship. Ask yourself this question—is this a song that they could sing on the way home or during the week? It is helpful to provide them with fodder for their personal worship.

There are many things to keep in mind when choosing songs for corporate worship:

- key choices (not too high or low; avoid all the songs in the same key, but also refrain from changing keys every song),
- pacing (is there a good progression to the pacing and energy, or is everything the same pace—fast or slow?),
- simplicity,
- ease of singing,

- familiarity with the song,
- content of the song.
- Contemporize hymns and simplify choruses. (In other words, bring a more interesting chordal accompaniment to hymns and avoid high syncopation in choruses.)

Why do songs need to be simplified for congregations? So that maximum participation can happen. The key thing to remember is that you don't want people to think they are singing difficult music. (For example: "Draw Me Close." This is a beautiful song, but it is hard for a group to figure out how long to hold some of the notes, or what the next interval will be. A better choice is "Lord I Lift Your Name on High." It is syncopated, but the syncopation is regular, with no surprises in the rhythm or melody.) Avoid the problem of people focusing so much on the music (trying to get it right) that they can't enjoy the experience of the song.

b) How can you guide the people where you want them to go (i.e., into God's presence)?

- Use transition sentences between songs or sections of the service.
- Use Scripture to reinforce and guide.
- Give directions (don't be afraid of giving directions to people; they need the directions to help them feel comfortable in the journey of worship!).

*c) Types and usages of music.*¹³

There are many different ways of using music within worship. There are the obvious ones, such as praise and worship, but there are others, shown in the list below, that help bring an added dimension to the congregation's understanding and response.

- praise and worship
- teaching God's word
- to release God's power (Acts 16:25-26, 2 Chr. 20:22)
- to tell of God's works and stir our faith

¹³ Tom Kraeuter, *Keys to Becoming an Effective Worship Leader* (Hillsboro: Training Resources, 1991), 72-73.

- to bring unity in our services
- prepares hearts to hear God's word
- to respond to God
- for confession and repentance

Music can very effectively be used as a response, but we need to bring people to that point of response first. Too often, we expect the music to do the work of comprehension and response all by itself (for example, a song about the awesomeness of God is sung with the expectation that people will immediately respond to the awesomeness that is talked about in the song). The congregation does not have the advantage you do, of having spent time with the service topic, looking for songs to express it well, and knowing why a song is being sung at a certain time. Because of that preparation, your response will be different from theirs! They need more preparation to get to the same point.

d) The thought process of songs.

A series of songs may be very well-linked musically, but still not guide the congregation well. Along with musicality, you need to look at the content of the songs—what do the words say, what is the overall thrust of the song? The congregation may enjoy each song separately and sing it well, but the content, or intent, of the songs do not build on each other so the thought cannot grow in the minds of the congregation. A problematic example might be a song sequence like this:

Draw Me Close (an intimate song from singer to Jesus, first person surrender)
Rock of Ages (a song about Jesus, describing an attribute)
Days of Elijah (a song about Christ's coming and the renewal of the church)
It is Well with My Soul (a personal song of peace in the midst of turmoil and pain)
We Believe (a sung version of the Apostles' Creed, affirming basic beliefs)

Individually, each song is wonderful, with great words and music. However, each song also has its own tone and intent. Looking at the above list, you can see the ping-pong effect on the congregation; starting right off with a plea to be intimate with Christ, then taking a step back

from that intimacy to talk about who Jesus is, then moving off to celebrate the triumphant return of Christ and a discussion of the spiritual tone of the world today. Then we suddenly swing back to intimacy, resting in Christ and immediately pop from that out into a corporate expression of theological belief. The content of the songs do not build on each other effectively (even if the musical content flows nicely), leaving the congregation to either mentally bounce like a pinball between songs, or stop thinking about what they are singing and just enjoy the music.

e) The physicality of leading.

How do you direct songs so that people feel included/led? If you are only beating time for the musicians, you will have great accompaniment, but the congregation will not know what to do. Likewise, if you only lead with your voice, people will not know what is expected. A simple gesture can help bring them in at the right time; occasionally indicating the tempo will help keep everyone together. Always err on the side of too much direction/instruction rather than risk letting people flounder through songs on their own.

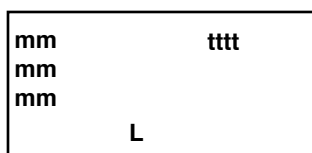
Look at some cosmetic factors—are you bringing people along or shutting them out facially or kinesically? Shutting your eyes while singing is something that a leader cannot afford to do—it is a sign of personal worship, a shutting out of all surrounding distractions, and so the congregation watching you feels like a distraction that is being shut out! Use your eyes and gestures to connect with the congregation and direct their attention to God. Let the meaning of the song show in your voice and in your body language. Always be attentive to the “feel” from the audience and figure out what you can do to shape it, or help the stragglers catch up with the group.

2. Physical arrangement of musicians.

What message are you communicating with your arrangement of platform personnel? Are they easily seen and equal leaders? Are they a backup to the main leader? Are they invisible, but

heard?

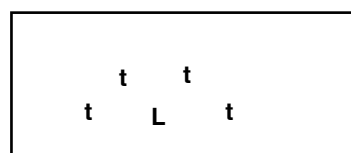
How can the congregation be included? Try thinking in terms of a “whole room” worship space, not a platform area in front of an audience. Look for things to do among the congregation, as a part of them, such as processions, antiphonal singing from the balcony, a soloist coming from out of the congregation. The diagrams below give just a small sample of the possibilities for placement of musicians. Obviously, you are also limited by the constraints of your particular stage as well.



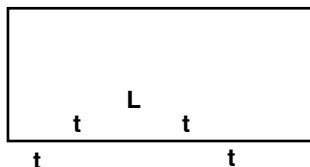
worship leader as center,
with singers as his backup



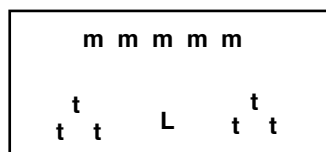
singers are equal leaders



another version of leader and
backup, but slightly more group-
oriented



leader in control, team
identifying with the
congregation



a balanced ensemble—a
bit performance oriented

Some sample visual looks at platform arrangement and what use of space says

3. Physical appearance of the room.

Visual and environmental art can immeasurably enhance the experience of worship for the congregation. Think about how well stores create a mood for different seasons! It gives a certain delight to walk into a room filled with tastefully-decorated Christmas trees, mangers, and other acoutrements of the season. Why should we not have that same delight when we walk into God’s room? Certainly God felt that way when he gave such minute descriptions to the Israelites

for decorating the Tabernacle and the Temple (just read Exodus 36!). He delights in beauty!

Creating an environment of worship for people to enter into will help them make the mental shift from their mundane, daily life into the house of God. Appropriate use of the arts (such as painting, banners, sculpture, graphic design) can also help focus the congregation's attention on the main theme, or mood, of the day's service as well. Some examples: visuals behind the words of songs on PowerPoint can give something to focus on. How do you use your bulletin? Instead of the usual service outline listed (e.g., prelude, welcome, songs, offering, sermon), is there a way to give more food for thought? It may be something like: "Prelude—begin to focus on God's holiness throughout the week; Welcome—we join with the body to enter his courts together; Songs—give written pointers for the flow of songs or Scripture; Offering—our response to God out of grateful hearts; Sermon—whatever the focus is. Bring the point home as many ways as you can!

4. The human touch.

Ushers can help with creating an environment for the congregation, ushering them into a worshipful setting. For example, beside handing out bulletins, they can physically usher people to good seats. This helps overcome the problem of "bunching"—people crowded in the back rows with no one up front or on the left side. When there are large empty spaces in the congregation it sends a subtle message to everyone; maybe people are gone on vacation or to a special event, perhaps the pastor is scary and no one wants to get too close, maybe the people in the congregation don't like each other (or are "cliquish") or people are leaving, rather than coming to, the church. In helping to seat people, ushers can change the signals being given by use of space in seating. Ushers can be especially helpful with latecomers. There may be several seats open toward the front, but people coming in late feel uncomfortable walking to them. All eyes will single them out as they do their solo walk! If an usher takes charge and escorts them, the embarrassment will lessen for the latecomer.

5. Always keep the security and comfort of the congregation in mind.

Our job as worship leaders is to create an environment that is safe, encouraging and that facilitates the freedom of worship by the people. This means going the extra mile in terms of directions, preparation, response to expressed needs, even the subjugation of our own desires (for instance, in wanting to sing a particular chorus) in order to make the congregation secure. This does not imply that no change can happen—it can, but slowly and in an atmosphere of security. Don't “pull the rug out from under them,” introducing change after change without returning to what is familiar and safe. Include the congregation in the changes.

Application

- how can you *slowly* make desired changes?
- how can the group (congregation) help foster intimacy among themselves, recognize needs and stimulate desire the meet those needs?

C. CONGREGATIONAL PARTICIPATION

Questions for discussion

- What role does your congregation play in the worship service? What ways do they participate?
- How are you facilitating these actions?

Too much of what goes on on Sunday mornings is a songfest. This is good—Scripture commands us to sing and most people enjoy the process of singing. But this is just a small part of worship. The words used in Scripture most often for worship are translated to “bow down/do homage,” to “kiss toward,” to “serve/minister,” to “sacrifice/bring an offering” and to “confess

sin/profess belief in God.” Worship is a verb. For worship to happen means action on the part of the worshipped; not observation of performance. Are we worshipping or watching? How do you get the balance? It needs to be simultaneous, not separate.

The more people are involved in the communication of the message, the more they will commit to it. So the application for this principle is simple—increase participation! People are often frustrated by their inability to participate (through unfamiliar songs, difficult rhythms, not much of anything beside music...). This is not necessarily an indication of their lack of desire to worship, because they may be very willing to express their worship through song and find that they know none of the songs! So how can they participate more?

- *Singing* (see the guidelines for choosing appropriate songs, above).
- *Scripture reading*: Look at creative ways of doing this: dramatic, leader/response, unison, several people, 2 groups, round-robin. Spend time with readers working on delivery and meaning of the text so that they can read it with real meaning.
- *Prayer*: How can it be participatory and involving? Experiment with guided prayer—have people ready after gathering information on a topic all week—, small groups sharing requests and praying aloud or silently, leader/response, popcorn, unison, silent/private, everyone out loud all at once. Look at the types of prayers that can be done:
 - prayers of gathering/invocation
 - prayers introducing the theme of the day (the collect)
 - prayers of confession—unison or silently
 - prayers of the leader (such as the pastoral prayer)
 - prayers of the people (where they are actively participating through reading a prayer or praying spontaneously).

- *Testimony.* What are we remembering about God and His interactions with us? Have one person, or several, testify to God's presence and work in his life.

- *Group sharing/Body life.* Announcements should be considered a part of the Body life, but how should they be done? Are they just information points to get out of the way before moving on with worship? They can help bind people together into a caring community and help demonstrate to the diverse congregation that there is common ground. How can you make them a part of the worship experience? Avoid statements like, "Just a couple of announcements for you this morning." That sends the message that they are something to be got out of the way in order to move ahead with the important things of the service. Try tying them in with the theme, or show how each announcement is a working out of the Body's faith. You might be better served by scattering the announcements throughout the service as they relate to appropriate places. Look at all the ways that the church body can stay informed—videos, bulletin inserts, newsletter, small group sharing during the service, and many other ways.

- *Greeting/welcome.* Is this a time to catch up with friends, or a time to help everyone enter God's presence as a family? It can be a time to connect with others, but also a time for each congregant to help another focus on the reason for the time of corporate worship.

- *Giving.* There certainly is participation in this, as the offering plate is passed from one person to another, each putting in their offering. Try different ways of giving, such as coming forward by rows to give the offering.

- *The dismissal/benediction.* This is an ideal time to solicit participation on the part of the congregation. What are they going to do in response to the entire service they have just been through? Traditionally, a closing song has been sung—an excellent way to get everyone

participating—but there are other ways as well, such as charging each member to act on the message, or give a charge to the person next to them (“Go seek God’s presence this week”), or recite a closing benediction together (such as the “Grace”).

• *Increase the use of signal systems.* Communication takes place through more than just speech and gesture. It can be categorized into 12 signal systems (see below). Too often the corporate worship service relies on just a few signal systems—usually verbal, audio/music and written, and sometimes kinesic (if people stand for singing or Scripture). The more involved the congregation is, the more signal systems will be used (or, conversely, the more you want to involve them, the more signal systems you will incorporate).

The Twelve Signal Systems¹⁴

1. *Verbal*—speech. This is an obvious participation point in allowing the congregation to speak praises, prayers, confession, teaching, etc.
2. *Written*—symbols representing speech. Words for songs, either in books or overhead screen, are common. What about writing worship notes or sermon notes? Look at how the bulletin can give written guides for the day’s journey of worship.
3. *Numeric*—numbers and number systems.
4. *Pictorial*—two-dimensional representations. What about slides, PowerPoint or video being shown during a special music offering (coordinating the pictures to visually express the meaning of the song)? Paintings, banners, bulletin covers can all enhance worship.
5. *Artifactual*—three-dimensional representations and objects. What objects can communicate? Sculptures are an artistic communication, but even the types of chairs/pews the congregation sits in says something, as does the carpet, the instruments, the pulpit, the plants, the clothes worn on the platform, etc.

¹⁴ Smith, 146.

6. *Audio*—use of nonverbal sounds and silence. Music is an obvious choice here, as is the tone of voice used in speaking. How often, though, is silence used? Are you too busy filling the spaces with instrumentals or talk? Don't be afraid of silence. It is powerful, meditative and convicting.
7. *Kinesic*—body motions, facial expressions, posture. Work through Ps. 95 and its postures. Many songs speak of raising hands and dancing. Try kneeling or bowing, either in a song, prayer, or in response to a part of the service. Try standing for the reading of Scripture. What is your face communicating? Your gestures?
8. *Optical*—light and color. Stage lighting can help enhance moods of worship or direct focus. Even working with regular house lights can help. Color also communicates—is everything somber gray, or cheerful red? How is color contributing to worship?
9. *Tactile*—touch, the sense of “feel.” Clapping is often done in song, in response, in praise. What about greeting one another with a “holy kiss” (or the equivalent)?
10. *Spatial*—utilization of space. How people and platform are arranged sends a powerful message: is it performer/audience, lecture/hearers, communal endeavor? Do you use different spaces for different parts of the service (maybe using one side of the room for communion, the other for teaching)? Are people too far apart, creating a feeling of alienation? If there are too many empty chairs, people will get the feeling that this church is not worth coming to, or is shrinking, even if that's not the case.
11. *Temporal*—utilization of time. Honor people's sense of time. In the U.S., that means being punctual and prompt in ending. Give them enough time to complete their sense of worship and move on, or have time to prepare. If you have two services, make sure there is plenty of time for people to exit one service and come in for the next without overlapping or being rushed.
12. *Olfactory*—taste and smell. The best use of this is at the communion table. This is

the ultimate symbol of identification with Christ.

We will worship when we let go of our defenses, let God into our inner being; worship versus inspiration. We don't like to be uncomfortable and we don't like to look ridiculous or be out of control—yet I think we need to risk all that in order to worship. Look at David, dancing in his underwear before the ark of God. He was totally abandoned to God, not caring about people's reactions to him, intent only on the joy of the presence of God in the midst of Israel. Encourage people to focus on God and who He is, rather than what we look like and are doing.

Application

- how many of the signal systems can be incorporated in communicating the message?
- is there an interactive way you can do a usual element?
- what is one thing people can do that team usually does?¹⁵
- how can you encourage people to externalize what they feel internally?
- how can you begin making a “whole room” worship space instead of “platform”?
- what combination of arts will involve as many senses as possible?
- what response to you want to see to each element?

D. TEACHING

Question for discussion

- How does teaching happen in your service? List the ways.
- Look at your stated purpose for corporate worship. How does the sermon fit into it?

This statement will most likely step on toes, but the oratorical model of sermon is not the absolute of teaching, and it is not worship. When you look at all the references to preaching in Scripture, you find that preaching was for the purpose of proclaiming the kingdom of God in

¹⁵ Some of these points are taken from Morgenthaler, 118.

order to bring people to repentance and belief. (Rom. 10:14: “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”) The typical sermon is a good teaching tool, but it is not worship. Preaching and worship, even teaching and worship, are not talked about together in Scripture (with the possible exception of Acts 2:42 which gives a list of what the early church did).

That does not downplay the importance of teaching and preaching—it is very important! But it raises the question as to why the sermon the *center* of our worship services. Songs, prayer, Scripture, and all other elements are generally considered second place to the important event—the sermon. That’s fine if your purpose for the entire service is to teach, but please don’t call it worship! Teaching is an *act* of worship, but not the entirety of worship. A more balanced view of the relationship between teaching’s role and worship is found in Psalms 119:27: “Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.” Teaching about God necessarily informs our worship. Don’t get locked into a pattern of preaching (always 3 points and conclusion; or always at the end of the service). Look at placement and style. The entire service doesn’t always have to lead up to the sermon. What are you trying to communicate? How can you improve the communication and response? How can what you are teaching inform the congregation’s worship?

John 4:24 states: “God is Spirit and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” This points out that the affective (emotions) and the cognitive (mind) are needed together for worship to happen. As Warren Wiersbe says:

True worship is balanced and involves the mind, the emotions, and the will. It must be intelligent; it must reach deep within and be motivated by love; and it must lead to obedient actions that glorify God.¹⁶

¹⁶ Wiersbe, 21.

All communication has simultaneous rational and emotional dimensions.¹⁷ In other words, look for ways to bring in emotional aspects when giving a rational talk. The common method of doing this in a sermon is to tell a joke or story that brings the point to life. Some suggestions (given by Robert Webber) to increasing overall response to the sermon include:

- a talk-back sermon, where congregation and preacher give and take,
- sermon response group—a group that interacts with the sermon and gives its reflections,
- studying the sermon during Sunday School,
- making the sermon available for personal study and worship during the week.

Another very valuable way of bringing out the rational, emotional and volitional aspect of the teaching point is through drama. Drama can illustrate, demonstrate, role play, present a problem, bring Scripture to life, and many other things. Drama combined with teaching or a question-and-answer discussion can be a tremendously effective way to teach truth. See Appendix A for a more complete list of types of drama and drama usages.

Application

- Try an occasional departure from normal programming. Remember that the higher the predictability, the lower the impact. (This applies to all worship, not just teaching.)
- look at drama not as part of the “worship service” but as an integral part of teaching
- move expositional preaching to a teaching slot separate from the worship
- open up more time for interaction, participation, shorter kernels of truth
- how can you increase your use of signal systems this week?

E. CULTURAL EXPRESSION

¹⁷ Smith’s Proposition 20.

There really is no one model of worship that works in every culture and every generation. It is for you to use these guidelines and apply them to your congregation, or to your intended audience. Some summaries that might help point out the differences in cultural values for worship are shown here:

- *Builders* (the post-war, older generation in the US): they prefer oration, quiet, hymns, predictability, organ/piano, formality, doctrine, heart more important than excellence.
- *Boomers* (the 60s generation): how-to sermons, praise songs, relaxed environment, anonymity, band, experience, variety, excellence.
- *Busters/Gen X*: They want to be led into God's presence. Be real, not slick or manipulative. Excellence for the Lord in everything. Participation not spectators. Don't be boring and predictable. Be community. Be relevant. Mix up music styles. Look to the past (repackage). Deep Scripture and application. Respect their time. Have fun.
- *Other countries*. Many cultures are story-oriented—utilize that for teaching. Muslims prostrate themselves to pray. In less-urbanized parts of Africa, time is not an issue, so 1:15 hour services are often too short! Hindus worship individually, or in family groups, in the temples, using “bhajans”—Hindu-style songs that reflect and teach. They receive religious instruction from gurus, or in ashrams (living/learning communities).

Application

- Look at the cultural values and traditions of your community. How should the structure of your worship service reflect that?

III. APPLYING THE MORTAR

Question for Discussion

- What process do you go through in planning the corporate worship service?
- How do you decide what element goes where?

1. Is it a platypus?

When the first platypus was brought from Australia to Europe, everyone thought that it had to have been put together using parts of other animals—surely nothing that odd-looking could have been a purposeful creation! Too often, our worship services end up looking like platypuses too. All the elements may be in the service, but they are thrown together in odd ways, with no thought for the overall pleasing picture. Just as a wall is not secure without mortar, so a worship service is not fully effective without attention to the details that hold it together—the flow of the service, the transitions, and the extra bits of communication (in other words, the building design or plan!). Don't be satisfied with what is comfortable and convenient (let's get something for everyone, the usual elements); rather, ask how they all fit together and reveal God. Remember, the goal of the worship service is to lead people into communication with God in His presence.

2. Planning for full expression

- Look at the Scripture/topic for the day and discuss:
 - how can it best be expressed?
 - how can people respond to it?

- Don't settle on the same format every week. A template service will not serve all the needs of communication. That doesn't mean you should drastically change everything every week! That would make the congregation dizzy and insecure. However, the higher the

predictability, the lower the impact. To avoid that, you need to look at how format serves worship, not the other way around.

- Brainstorm!

- what role can music play in this service?
- what musical pieces contribute to the focus?
- how can we use the choir, solos, worship team, congregational songs, instrumental music, and so on?
- what role can the arts play? Drama, Scripture, dance, environment, visual, banners, graphics, etc.
- how can announcements contribute to the worship scheme this week? What is the best forum for them?
- what role can the bulletin, ushers, follow-up, technical (PowerPoint, sound) play?

- Keep in the mind the essentials of worship. Remember Webber's fourfold pattern of worship.

3. Avoiding free-falls

Watch out for detractors. If God is indeed the audience, and the worship leader is there to lead people into God's presence, then what are we doing, or not doing, to facilitate this happening? What needs to change in order to enable it? What are the road blocks?

A classic example of a detractor is the place of welcoming. Very often an opening song will be sung, gathering the people into worship. Their eyes begin to turn to God, then the music stops and announcements are given, concluding with a command to turn to your neighbor and say hello. This is counterproductive to worship. It's as if you stepped into God's presence then

stopped and said, “Oh, excuse me a minute God,” and stepped out to greet a passerby. Then you step back and say, “OK, continue.” Why build such potholes into the service? Think about a better place in the greater flow of events.

Likewise, just a few well-chosen words can help the congregation smoothly make the transition between elements of a service. It will help avoid confusion in their minds: “What does this have to do with what we were just talking about, or singing about?” Avoid a free-fall from the divine to the mundane (“We were just celebrating God, now I have to stop and talk to my neighbor?”).

Another detractor can be the type of song you choose to begin with: Is it a welcoming song, or a theology song? Most of the congregation does not come into a worship service prepared to immediately start worshipping—they have been chatting with friends in the hall or aisles, running their children to Sunday School, collecting things, looking for a place to sit, etc., and have barely sat down before the singing starts. If the song is teaching, theological, or even devotional then their minds are not prepared to receive that teaching. They hardly know where they are at this point let alone who God is! This becomes a free-fall into worship, rather than a gentle ramp leading into worship.

4. Outline steps of planning

- Get the theme early—do your own study, begin picking songs and elements.
- Meet with the pastor well in advance of the service. Find out:
 - Theme/scripture passages
 - What special items are in the service (e.g., communion, dedication, special announcements)
 - How should we set up the sermon
 - How should we conclude the service?

- Is there an action the congregation needs to do?
- Brainstorm about ways to best communicate the message and allow for worship
- Start planning the service. How do all the elements contribute to the overall plan?
- Show a rough draft to the pastor and other key personnel. Make changes as necessary.
- Prepare for the rehearsal:
 - Who is taking ownership of the details of the service?
 - Has everyone involved been contacted who is involved in the service?
 - Is it clear exactly who is doing what?

Communication at all stages is key!

2. Connect the dots (make the connections between point A and point B)

- Can you make a complete sentence(s) out of the flow of your worship service?
(e.g., “We have come here as a group to praise God for His faithfulness, as evidenced by His specific work in the Body this week, and in my own life. God shows His faithfulness in Scripture through the story of Joseph. Hearing of the example of Joseph, and looking at His faithfulness to me causes me to confess my unfaithfulness toward Him, repent and receive assurance of His continued love which causes me again to praise Him. Because of his forgiveness, I can go out this week rejoicing.”)

Application

- Come up with an “ideal” service, then look at how to make it happen.

4. Evaluate and get feedback regularly

Questions for discussion

- What kind of evaluation do you do to find out whether or not worship is happening?

How will you know?

Evaluation and feedback are valuable tools in correcting or staying the course. If you never check whether or not your worship service met its goals, or if there were things that went wrong or worked well, how will you know how to improve? God calls us to excellence, which implies continual evaluation, correction, practice and growing skill.

Give credit generously to participants, leaders and congregation and take the blame on yourself if something doesn't work. Listen for the underlying concern (or ideal) in a stated criticism to see how your ideal is not being communicated or is contradicting their ideal.

Remember security: don't move too fast in making changes in an existing service. Listen to the feedback coming from the congregation and other leaders. Sometimes it's good, sometimes not. People don't like feeling out of their comfort zone, so change only one or two elements at a time. And make sure there is plenty of communication (two-way, not just one-sided dumping of information) about the changes. Perhaps aim for a creative, different service once a month or bimonthly.

Change is often withheld or made based on the opinions of a vocal few—what about the non-vocal ones, those who come faithfully but are not fulfilled? Consider a comprehensive survey that can give you a true picture of people's mindsets. When implementing change, prepare the opinion leaders for what's to come—don't surprise them. Change is hard; people don't want to move or go out of their comfort zone. We need to “make haste slowly” with continual communication as to the “why” of what we are doing and attempting.

Application¹⁸

- Go over each part of the service, evaluating strengths, weaknesses and ways to improve.

The Spatial and Environmental Setting

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

The Order and Flow of Worship

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Music and the Arts: how well did they service the text of worship?

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

¹⁸ Robert Webber, *Planning Blended Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998),

APPENDIX A TYPES AND USAGES OF DRAMA

TYPES OF DRAMA:

1. Dramatic Scripture Reading (e.g. Acts 19, bringing the riots to life).
2. Tableau — Living Slides/Pictures
Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" has often been done this way, i.e., as tableau with individual characters coming to life to speak their thoughts.
Try creating human tableaux out of Mark 9:31-37.
3. Readers Theatre:
Oral interpretation of literature by readers for an audience. A script or story read in a way that substitutes for acting it out.
Can either:
 - a) act with script in hand
 - b) sit and read
 - c) use simple choreography/movement, including using the folders as script holder or props, as in "The Three Trees"
 The narration establishes the scenes, mood, exposition. Placement of focus in readers theatre is also important, as it audience and readers focus on an "other" place.
4. Speech Choir:
Group spoken interpretation of stories, poems or Scripture.
5. Other Readings:
 - a) Antiphonal
 - b) Line-around
 - c) Cumulative/Fugue reading (e.g. Psalm 150)
 - d) Solo & Chorus (e.g. Ps. 136)
 - e) Unison (e.g. Ps. 133)
6. Skits/sketches
7. One-act plays
8. Full-length plays
9. Oral narratives/Storytelling
10. Monologues.
11. Puppets:

socks, muppets, marionettes, paper, Bunraku, shadow, cutouts, etc.

12. Creative Movement:
dance, motion, sign language
13. Shadow Plays
14. Video
15. Tape-recorder plays/Radio drama
16. Slide Shows
17. Combination tape/slide shows
18. Scroll painting narrative:
singing, telling or acting out a story that is portrayed on a painted scroll.
19. Street theatre:
high energy, short pieces done in public places
20. Pantomime:
acting without words but using everyday, exaggerated gestures
21. Classic Mime
22. Mime to Music/Human Music Videos
23. Clowning
24. Sounds, Adding Sound Effects (e.g. 1 Kings 1:39-40)
25. Rhythm instruments:
using instruments to create background effects, e.g. blocks of wood rubbing together as the Israelites cross the desert.
26. Masks:
puzzle piece masks, paper plates, paper bags, carnival masks, African masks, full head or body masks
27. Pageants (such as the standard Christmas and Easter pageants)
28. Musical Productions
29. Role Play:
Like community development dramas, to communicate a point, getting the

audience to act out what they would do and use it as a teaching opportunity.

30. Audience participation:
Where some preplanning is done for costuming, set, environment or setup, but the audience acts on the spot, either chosen by the director, or group, or walking through a scene together (as in a Walk-Through Holy Week).
31. Poetry recitation

USAGES OF DRAMA:

1. Sermon set-up sketches and illustrations
2. Illustrating different aspects of the worship service:
prayer, baptism, offering, communion, invocation, Advent, Lent
3. As the sermon
5. Special events—Easter, Christmas, Valentine’s, concerts, summer stock, just because
6. Dinner theatre
7. Outside groups as special number
8. Illustrations for fellowship groups, Sunday School, Bible studies, etc.
9. Announcements
10. Outreach to prisons, schools, missions
11. Dramatic worship services:
an integrated service that uses drama and music to lead people in worship.

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