



WORSHIP IN THE SMALL CHURCH

INSIGHTS FOR THE BI-VOCATIONAL PASTOR

BIVOCATIONAL LEADERSHIP SERIES

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WORSHIP IN THE SMALL CHURCH

INSIGHTS FOR THE BI-VOCATIONAL PASTOR

The Pastor is the Worship Leader in the Church

Most churches have bylaws say which say something like this: “The pastor shall conduct the worship services and oversee the two ordinances of the church.” People who used to have titles like minister of music or song leader now often have the title, “worship leader.” Nevertheless, you bear the ultimate responsibility to see that worship services are carried out in way which is biblically appropriate and meaningful to the members. They may call you “preacher,” but most churches want their pastor to lead effective worship services. There are several reasons this may be difficult in the small church. This booklet is written to assist you in doing the things you *can* do and to relieve you of the burden of not being able to do the things you can’t.

The Church Show

A family once attended church, which was for them a rare occurrence. When they got home the dad was complaining about how long the service lasted, how badly the choir sang, how boring the preacher was, and so forth. The son, who had seen what his father had placed in the offering plate, finally replied “Dad, I thought it was a pretty good show for a dollar.”

Many members of our congregations look at our worship services as if they were a weekly show one attends and then goes home to critique. Due to the influence of television, mega-churches, and the contemporary worship movement, churches now value production values like never before. That is not to say these are all bad things, but they have definitely influenced how people perceive our church worship services. Smaller churches often feel they don’t have the money or talent or numbers to keep up. It may feel very defeating. However, you can lead the church you have in worship that is meaningful and life-changing.

Summary Preview:

- ◇ **You may not have the same resources as larger churches, but you have some other strengths working for you.**
- ◇ **Worship is about God and is addressed to God; it’s not a show for an audience.**
- ◇ **Worship begins with a glimpse of God.**
- ◇ **Worship is the discipline of loving God with one’s mind.**
- ◇ **Worship flows from the human spirits of people who have been born again.**
- ◇ **Worship involves both joyful celebration and reverent contemplation.**
- ◇ **Leading worship involves helping our members get a glimpse of God.**
- ◇ **Leading worship involves providing members with opportunities to appropriately respond to God in obedience and surrender, adoration, and praise.**

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Two Things Going for You

There are two things going for you in the small church: *community* and *the presence of God*.

If you attend a big box church, you may sit around different people every week. No one notices when you are absent. There are no adopted grandparents. There is no sense of church family. No matter how talented the praise team at Box Church, this level of community is something they cannot offer.

The second thing you should have going for you is the presence of God. That is not to say that the contemporary church down the road doesn't experience his presence, but the fact they have better production values doesn't take the experience of his presence away from *your* church.

Worship is Central

Regardless of how challenging it may feel to lead worship in the small church, your members need to worship also. God commands it. The Father seeks it, Jesus made it possible, and the Spirit empowers it. Worship is a big deal! David Edwards explains why:

The Bible contains no less than six hundred references to worship—and uses at least eighty-seven different Hebrew and Greek words to describe praise and worship. Worship is an activity that takes place throughout the pages of God's Word. It existed before the earth was made and will be a part of the new heaven and earth that is yet to come.

Worship is the most important ministry of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Her worship *to* Him must come before her ministry *for* Him.¹

Start with Why

We always need to start with why, since *when you know the why, you know the what*. If we have grown up in church, we intuitively know what the morning worship service is for, what Sunday School is for, what Wednesday nights are for... *or we think we do*. In planning our worship services, we should start with "why." What is the unique purpose of the worship service? Is it an evangelistic rally? What does the worship service offer that other church gatherings and church groups do not? For example, what is the difference between a Sunday School class and a worship service? Both emphasize the teaching of the Word. They both include prayer. They may both receive offerings and even sing hymns. Some churches have Sunday School classes with larger attendance than some smaller churches and which operate like small churches. So, what exactly is the difference?

Sunday School is a small fellowship gathered around the Word to learn together.

In a worship service, the whole church gathers under the Word to get a glimpse of God and to respond to Him in adoration and obedience.

Some of the differences are seen in group dynamics and some are seen in the frame of mind of the participants. However, here are some of the key differences:

¹ David M. Edwards, *Worship 365: The Power of a Worshipping Life* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2011).

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- ◇ The Sunday School class is a small group for people like me; the worship service is for everyone, including people unlike me. The worship service is multi-generational and more diverse. In the worship service, I am part of something bigger than myself.
- ◇ The purposes of the Sunday School class are to reach, teach, and minister. However, the class may not administer the ordinances, as in the worship service.
- ◇ The Sunday School class doesn't possess any authority except as delegated to it by the church body as a whole. The worship service, led by ordained minister(s), possesses a higher level of authority than the Sunday School class.
- ◇ More importantly, the worship service, as its name implies, is a gathering for the stated purpose of worshiping the Triune God.

Describing a Worship Service:

The First Baptist Church of Tallassee lists thirteen “church principles” — below is *The Principle of Christian Worship*:

Worship isn't about the style of music or the order of worship or a performance to be enjoyed. In worship, the church gathers to glorify God for His greatness, delight in His goodness, and acknowledge His righteousness. It is opening our hearts to God and surrendering ourselves to do the will of God. It adores God from one's spirit and with one's mind. Worship involves both joyful celebration and reverent contemplation; we will do both through Jesus Christ. ²

There are Some Things Worship is Not:

Worship is not a form of entertainment. Though God's people delight in it, it is a delight *in God* they are experiencing. Too much of what is called worship is about hearing the singer hit the high note or people becoming emotional as the preacher “gets on a roll.” Even lost people are quite capable of enjoying this kind of thing.

Many of our church members have trouble distinguishing between stirrings from the Spirit of God and sentimental emotions. This is because both register in our innermost beings. Even though “precious memories” may linger, they aren't necessarily spiritual.

Sometimes you hear someone say something like, “We have praise at our church.” What they mean is they have a particular style of music and there are particular ways in which they respond — perhaps praise choruses and uplifted hands. Or you may hear someone remark, “The services are so worshipful at our church.” And what they mean is they sing hymns with words they find to have theological depth and their services are quiet, allowing them to think about God and the meaning of the words. Is it possible to worship the style in which we worship rather than the One we worship?

¹ www.fbctallassee.com/pdf/church_principles.pdf

² For a list of attributes of God, see pages 25-29 in the bonus section.

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Worship is About God:

If worship is about God, not ourselves, then the question concerns, not what we got out of it, but what God got out of it. Psalm 115 says, “Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory because of your faithful love, because of your truth.”

We can try to draw attention to ourselves in worship by hamming up the music, the excessive use of humor in the sermon, and other things. Yet, if we search our hearts, we know that on this Sunday, there was too much self in it... and too much drawing attention to self.

Worship is Addressed to God:

There is an “unto Him” factor in praise. Consider these verses from the Psalms (KJV):

- ◇ Psalm 76:11 “Vow, and pay **unto Jehovah** your God: Let all that are round about him bring presents **unto him** that ought to be feared.”
- ◇ Psalm 95:2 “...Let us make a joyful noise **unto him** with psalms.”
- ◇ Psalm 100:4 “Give thanks **unto him**, and bless his name.”
- ◇ Psalm 105:2 “Sing **unto him**, sing praises **unto him**”

There is a phrase popular in Christian circles these days, “Audience of One.” There is even an abbreviation for it: **AO1**. Worship leaders should not “perform” for the congregation, but the congregation should worship for the pleasure of the One being worshipped. The question after the worship service is not, “Did the preacher have a good message?” or “How did the choir sound?” Even more important than, “What did you get out of the service?” is... *“What did God get from us out of the service today?”*

Worship Begins with a Glimpse of God

Isaiah 6 records the worship experience of the prophet Isaiah in his call to ministry: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne...” His reaction was an overwhelming sense of sinfulness. “Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King...” (vs. 5). This vision motivated responses of confession and surrender. They ranged from “Woe is me” to “Here am I; send me.”

The scriptures reveal the personal qualities of God. When the Holy Spirit illumines minds and people get a glimpse of his divine Person, they won’t have to be coached to praise; it will be spontaneous.

Leading worship involves helping our members get a glimpse of God and providing them with opportunities to respond to him in surrender and obedience, adoration, and praise.

Worship as a Discipline

Let’s be honest: sometimes, we just aren’t feeling it. We haven’t recently had a glimpse of God to which we could reflexively respond. Worship is a natural reaction to a fresh glimpse of God, but it is

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also a Christian discipline. Because we are commanded to worship the Lord, it is a matter of obedience. God doesn't look down from heaven and say, "Oh, poor baby, you aren't feeling worshipful today. That's OK. You stay home or go fishing. I understand." Instead, the Bible instructs us: "Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; bring an offering and enter his courts" (Psalm 96:8).

Worship is a discipline of the mind. The greatest commandment said Jesus is this: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, *and with all your mind.*" (Matthew 22:37). "And with all your mind," he said. That means that to praise God well we have to do a good job of thinking about God. It's not about the first thought that may pop into your head. It is not an emotion one simply feels. This kind of thought requires spending time in the Word and reflection and concentration. It costs us something. It's such an intentional, focused effort, the Bible calls it a *sacrifice*. "Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Hebrews 13:15).

Worship Flows From the Hearts of Those Who Has Been Born Again

In the new birth, God makes those who were dead in sin alive to himself. We had been separated from God, just as death separates us from the ones we love. We had been unresponsive to the things of God... bored with God. Then, we were born again. Things changed in our "want to." The things upon which we placed value changed. The Holy Spirit had come to dwell within us. Suddenly, spiritual realities, previously invisible to our eyes, became clearly visible — in fact, unmissable. "Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Unbelievers in our worship services cannot see the spiritual realities which thrill our souls. This is because, "The person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Lost people often sit with their arms crossed, silent in the song service, because there isn't a song in them to come out. Even if they drop a big check in the offering place, God is not impressed. "The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight" (Proverbs 15:8). As A. W. Tozer writes, "I can safely say, on the authority of all that is revealed in the Word of God, that any man or woman on this earth who is bored and turned off by worship is not ready for heaven."¹ Worship inevitably and naturally flows from the regenerate heart. The Holy Spirit enables us to see what God has done for us in the past and has in store for us in the future. And, in the present, we often sense his ongoing work in our lives, and the glimpse of this spiritual reality results in worship.

¹ Aiden Wilson Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?: A Call to True Worship* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 2006), 13.

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Worship Begins Internally

We each have a human spirit. Many people live such superficial lives, they need to get in touch with this fact of their existence. We are not animals with a higher IQ. Nor are we like machines with a brain for a computer. It is in our spirit we commune with God. It is in our spirits that, in those still moments, God speaks to us. We perceive spiritual truth in our spirits (1 Corinthians 2:10-12). It is in your spirit the Father assures you of your adoption as his child (Romans 8:16).

It is not a case of our spirits being good and our bodies being bad. For example, the Bible speaks of sins of the spirit (2 Corinthians 7:1). If our bodies are bad, why is God going to resurrect them? No, our whole person is involved in worship. Certainly, our physical bodies, including our brains, are involved. We are to command to love God with all our minds (Mark 12:30). But worship is more than simple intellectual agreement with a propositional statement about God. So, praise is not external and mechanical. It comes up from all the way down in our spirits:

- ◇ “Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46-47)
- ◇ “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.” (Psalm 103:1, KJV)
- ◇ “God is Spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24)

Not only is worship an expression of our human spirits, true worship is enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit: “We are . . . the ones who *worship by the Spirit of God*, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3, emphasis added).

Worship is Expressed

Some people, by nature, are less expressive than others. It is OK to have a quieter nature. However, to never bring one’s worship to expression is like saying, “I never give any money in the offering, but I feel giving in my heart.”

Psalm 150 tells us to pick a way and get to praising! Listing the arts and an orchestra of instruments from which to choose, it concludes, “Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord” (vs. 6, KJV).

Look at all the nuances of praise enumerated in Psalm 105:1-5:

- 1 Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name;
proclaim his deeds among the peoples.
- 2 Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell about all his wondrous works!
- 3 Boast in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
- 4 Seek the Lord and his strength;

¹ Jack R. Taylor, *The Hallelujah Factor*, ©1983, Broadman Press, pages 16-17

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seek his face always.

5 Remember the wondrous works he has done,

his wonders, and the judgments he has pronounced

Jack Taylor writes, “Praise is always active, assertive, demonstrative, and open. It is not passive, presumptuous, undemonstrative, or secretive... Praise is adoration of God that is vocal, audible, or visible (any one or all of these at a time).”²

Leading Worship

Leading worship involves helping our members get a glimpse of God and giving them opportunities to respond to him in surrender and obedience, adoration and praise.

It’s important for worship leaders to speak about God in meaningful ways. The better we understand and the more closely we encounter the Lord, the more impelled we will feel to “*glorify God for His greatness, delight in His goodness, and acknowledge His righteousness.*” This is why the preacher must make doctrine come alive! For a church to learn to praise, it is essential for the pastor to preach on the attributes of God. Doctrine is the fount from which worship flows.

We worship a Triune God. We are not Unitarians and we shouldn’t worship like it! Many of our members consider the doctrine of the Trinity to be a bunch of abstract gobbledygook. It is true (because that’s what they were told growing up), but it’s not a practical truth for daily living. “Just give me Jesus,” many feel. Many pastors don’t preach on the Trinity very often because it is, in fact, challenging to explain. However, this is who God is: a holy Trinity.

Clearly the New Testament teaches the complete deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit while at the same time distinguishing between them. Only the doctrine of the Trinity does justice to the plain teachings of the New Testament. ...the Bible teaches not only that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit possess the same essence as God the Father, but that they are equal with Him in power and glory.¹

When two young people fall in love, they want to learn everything about the other person: about their families, their favorite color, where they went to middle school, *everything*... because they love each other. If God has revealed himself to be Triune, how can we react with a shrug of the shoulders? “Don’t bore me with the details, Lord. I’m interested only in what is practical and what blesses me, not You personally!”

¹ Clarence H. Benson and Robert J. Morgan, *Exploring Theology: A Guide for Systematic Theology and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004).

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Music:

When Saul was tormented by an evil spirit, David's playing of the harp could soothe him (1 Samuel 16:23). Music can minister to our spirits. In fact, it is a language of the human spirit. The book of Psalms — the largest book in the Bible — is the hymnal of God's people. It provides lyrics for the soul. It can convey the depth of our hurt and enable us as we cry out to the Lord. It has the capacity to make one feel the greatness of the Lord and the tender mercies of the Lord. It can express our sense of anticipation. It can express adoration and admiration.

Music is not the only aspect of worship, though to hear many church folks talk, one would think it is the only one. When have you heard someone speak of the worship ministry in their church when they weren't referring to the music? However, we might take note there was no song service at the burning bush when Moses worshipped. There was no music when Isaiah worshipped in the throne room (Isaiah 6). The angels did not "sing" at the first Christmas: "Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and *saying* 'Glory to God in the highest...'" (Luke 2:13-14, emphasis added).

We would all do well to learn how to *say* our praises and not merely limit ourselves to singing them only. In fact, the choir member who can praise God in his daily devotionals by "speaking praise" is better prepared to "sing praise" in the Sunday morning worship service.

Nevertheless, music is a highly important part of corporate worship... and we are commanded to do so!

"Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." (Colossians 3:16)

Real Praise Expresses Itself Appropriate to the Glimpse of God Received

Sometimes, people have the idea that praise is a "foot stomping good time." Others feel praise is genuine if it is subdued and "reverent." Consider a few sample passages:

In Nehemiah 8, the people have finished rebuilding the city's defensive wall and, as they continue to rebuild their spiritual foundation, they gather for their first time to hear the Word of God read. They are shamed when they hear the commands they have violated. They begin to grieve over their sins. But because this moment represents a new beginning of obedience, they are instructed this is not a time to mourn, but of joy (vs. 9-12).

In Nehemiah 12, we read of the dedication of the city wall, rebuilt in the face of considerable opposition and devious plots. Verse 43 records: "On that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy. The women and children also celebrated, and Jerusalem's rejoicing was heard far away." God had given them a great victory and they celebrated it.

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In Revelation 1, John sees Jesus in his resurrected body, ascended and exalted. Even though this is “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 20:2; 21:20) and the one to whom Jesus entrusted the care of his mother (John 19:26-27), John he doesn’t run up to Jesus and hug him, glad to see him again. John records he was so terrified at the sight of Jesus, “I fell at his feet like a dead man” (vs. 17) .

In Revelation 4:6-8, John is shown a vision of the throne room of heaven and sees one seated on the throne. Four special angelic beings guard the throne. And because of their proximity and their ability to see, they constantly praise God:

*Four living creatures covered with eyes in front and in back were around the throne on each side... Day and night they never stop, saying,
Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God, the Almighty,
who was, who is, and who is to come.*

In Revelation 5, John saw a vision in which Jesus, the Lamb of God, has triumphed and is alone worthy to open the scroll to release the final events of history. In response, there is a cascade of ever expanding circles of praise. He watched the residents of heaven (four living creatures, twenty-four elders, millions of angels, people) who “fell down before the Lamb (vs. 8), and heard them as they “sang a new song” (vs. 9), said their praises “with a loud voice” (vs. 11), and affirmed the praises of others with their “Amen” (vs. 14).

If in the Bible, a glimpse of God can be terrifying and awe-inspiring, or loud and triumphant, what is our praise supposed to be like? Answer: It depends on the glimpse of God we have been given at the time. A solemn assembly for repentance will represent a different response than the Easter service celebrating Jesus’ resurrection. Worship leaders help the congregation know how to appropriately respond to the Lord... in surrender and obedience... in adoration and praise — and create opportunities for them to do so.

Progressing Through the Order of Service

Most worship services are not dedicated strictly to celebration or to contemplation. On most Sundays, we cover a spectrum. There are multiple glimpses of God and multiple kinds of responses to him. Thus, there is generally a progression in the order of service. Psalm 100 gives us some guidance (shown below in the KJV). In verses 1-2, we are commanded to begin with celebration:

*Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.
Serve the Lord with gladness:
Come before his presence with singing.*

And then, in verse 3, we move toward a more reverent contemplation of the Lord’s person:

*Know ye that the Lord he is God:
It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves;
We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

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Again, in verse 4, from the very start, entering the gates and coming into the courtyards, we celebrate God's goodness to us:

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving,

And into his courts with praise:

Be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

And also again, in verse 5, our thoughts move from what God has done for us, to the God who has done it:

For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting;

And his truth endureth to all generations.

Worship involves both joyful celebration and reverent contemplation.

Non-Musical Ways People Respond to God in Worship:

It is important for worship leaders to provide opportunities for those in the congregation to respond to the Lord, in addition to song. Here are some examples of ways we do that:

- ◇ The ordinance of Believer's Baptism
- ◇ The ordinance of the Lord's Supper
- ◇ Repentance
- ◇ Confession of sin
- ◇ Commitment to the Lord
- ◇ Purposing to obey God's Word or the Spirit's leading in a specific matter
- ◇ Reaffirming biblical a truth
- ◇ Thanking God for his salvation, provision, or protection
- ◇ Praising God specifically for one of his magnificent attributes
- ◇ Expressing adoration for God
- ◇ Worship in tithes and the giving of offerings
- ◇ Responsive Readings
- ◇ Expressing trust and dependence upon the Lord in the face of a specific life challenge
- ◇ Seeking God's guidance
- ◇ Accepting God's comfort or encouragement

Clearly, professions of faith and rededications are *not the only ways* one can respond to the Lord in a worship service. However, some of the items on this list we may fail to think of as worship, but consider them a box to be checked so we can get on to the "good stuff."

Baptists have historically rejected a liturgical worship on the grounds it can lead to going through the motions by rote. On the other hand, informal services can lead to going through motions as a matter of habit, just without the order of service. It seems the Holy Spirit just happens to "lead them" to do the exact same things *every. single. Sunday.* So, in planning services, it is best to give thought to various ex-

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pressions of worship and how to creatively provide opportunities for the congregation to respond to God. We will not be able to include every kind of response to the Lord in every service, but, over time, we can provide a balance. Further, we need to provide them opportunities to which they can relate and are meaningful *to them*.

Public Prayer in the Worship Service:

Try this: Record a whole worship service and listen to the prayers. See how similar they are. If we are honest, most of us basically string together sentences we have heard others use in their prayers. We thought those sentences sounded good and we added them to our repertoire. Instead, we need to be more intentional about public prayer.

Through the history of the church, we have invented different words to describe different prayers in the worship service, such as invocations, offertory prayers, pastoral prayers, and benedictions. These are listed and described in the bonus materials on page 20. However, for now, consider these two types of prayer in the worship service: pastoral prayers and guided prayers.

Pastoral Prayers: The pastor leads the pastoral prayer and acts as spokesman for the group. This prayer may be a general prayer seeking God's guidance or a general prayer of confession. It could also be a prayer specifically praising one attribute of God. These prayers can be meaningful in a time of crisis. Or, he may request of the congregation: "Please help me pray, by praying silently, as I lead in prayer. Follow my lead."

You may ask people to bow for prayer and ask, with heads bowed, for any who have a prayer burden to lift their hand for a brief moment and then put it back down. Then, the pastor can pray a general prayer for those who are going through a hard time.

Guided Prayers: In guided prayers, the pastor asks the congregation to pray, guiding them through some specific suggestions about what to pray. "Think of someone in your extended family who needs the Lord; pray for them right now... [pause]. Remember the missionary family in South America we have been praying for, the Greens; ask God to give them fruit for their labors... [pause]. And so forth.

Most pastors can remember a prayer service when he asked a member to lead in prayer about specific request, Prayer Request A... but then the member prayed a bunch of things unrelated to A. He prayed for B, C, and D. But he didn't even touch on A. Guided prayers help your congregation learn how to pray specifically and on-point. For example, guided prayers can be helpful in teaching your members to praise.

The guided prayer format can be helpful at the conclusion of the sermon as you ask members to respond to the message — that is, those who are already Christians and don't need to make a profession of faith — but need to apply the message for that day. Give them the opportunity to purpose before the Lord to obey, applying the biblical principal in their lives.

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The “Givens” in the Worship Service at Your Local Church

Many churches have parts of their order of worship which are a “given.” Often, there are unwritten rules about who prays the offertory prayer and so forth. Other examples include:

- ◇ The birthday church: where members put money for the Children’s Home in a plastic church and the congregation sings to them.
- ◇ Taking prayer requests
- ◇ Fellowship Hymn: During this hymn members shake hands

In some churches, if the pastor were to suggest a change, he could upset some members and get in real trouble. You may not be able to kill them the sacred cow without division in the church. So be careful.

One solution is to do these traditional things (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.) at the beginning, before you start the service proper. List this time in the bulletin as “pre-service events.” Then, have a call to worship. In other cases, you can occasionally move these parts to a different place in the order of the service (“Since this is a special service today, we will do so and so at this time”). You may be able to drop the item for a really big special service like revival Sunday or homecoming. Think through these changes together with your leaders. Start with why; share with them the reasons for the change.

Prepare Services for the People Who Come

In one congregation, responsive readings are meaningful to the members. Another congregation may be composed of oral learners. They don’t enjoy reading. Some congregations are on a more emotional wave-length; other congregations are composed of more logical thinkers. Be careful not to impose on your members styles of worship to which they cannot relate. But do challenge them to grow in their worship in ways that are honest and based on biblical truth.

Praise in the Church Starts with a Praising Pastor

Pastors have to set the pace in their personal devotional life as worshippers of God. Over time, the congregation will begin to reflect the priorities of their pastor. So, grow in praise, faithful pastor; our most anointed service is on the cutting edges of our own new growth. And, as you plan worship services, consciously depend on the Lord to reveal himself and to enable the people to respond to him in worship.

Practical Suggestions

Read the Scriptures Well: Read with expression. Never read Holy Scripture in a ho-hum voice as if you were rushing through the reading so you can get to the sermon. Remember, the *Word of God* is more important than the *word of you*. So, get a sense for the passage and for the words. Use variety as you read the words of different characters' voices in the text. Change speeds as you read — slow down for serious and sober words... speed up to communicate excitement, etc. Feel the words and make the congregation feel the words as you read.

Sing Songs That are Solid, Biblically and Theologically: Many church members learned most of their doctrine from the songs we sing at church. So, choose the songs wisely. For example, would someone guess your church believes in the Trinity by looking at your song selection? Do you consciously think about the attributes of God as you choose hymns and choruses? Don't sing only the songs you like personally. Think of it like a balance diet.

Do you need to align the music with the sermon? Selecting hymns, choruses, and special music to reinforce the message of the sermon are a good thing to do, but this may be overrated. Not as many church members notice the alignment as we may think. There isn't always a song that goes exactly with the sermon. If you are a busy bi-vocational pastor, you may still be in travail giving birth to the sermon when the songs are being selected. And sometimes, what the church sings really depends on what the pianist can play. Special services are one thing; the occasional themed service can be very meaningful. Perhaps the best approach is to do what you can, as you can, but don't allow it to become a ball and chain.

Stay On-Message for Worship: Remember, you have most of them only one hour per week. There are enough "non-worship items" we have to include, like announcements, to waste time on banter, making ourselves seem clever, and being cute. You don't have to be joyless to worship the King "high and lifted up."

Call People to Worship: Extend to them the invitation of Jesus who said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28, KJV). Call them to God; then they know to whom they are singing.

Introduce New Ways to Respond to God as Part of Your Sermon: You can teach your members new ways to respond to God during a sermon when it is part of and fits in your message. They will be more open during the sermon. You can explain the reason for it and even have them practice it.

The Offering: When you receive the offering, take a moment to introduce the opportunity, describing it as an act of worship and as a way of participating in the Lord's work. Don't act like it is something you need to apologize for or as something we just want to get over with.

Enable People to Bring Their Burdens to the Lord: Instead of asking members to clear their minds of all else and focus on the Lord, help them bring that problem to the Lord. While we wouldn't want worshippers to plan their weekly calendar during the service, they cannot help but worry. In

WORSHIP IN THE SMALL CHURCH

worship, people can trust God to guide and to help them.

Use Testimonies in the Services: There are salvation testimonies, and there are spiritual growth testimonies, and there are divine-intervention-God-came-through-with-a-miracle testimonies. You will have to help your members pick one testimony; you're not asking them to give their autobiography. And you will have to help them be prepared to tell "which time" it was they really got saved. But even if they mess it up a little bit, testimonies will bless your people.

Children's Sermon: The most frustrating thing about Children's Sermons is that grown-ups will tell you they get more out of the children's sermon than the adult sermon. These short devotionals can help you build rapport with the children. On the other hand, they take time to prepare. You have to remember that children are not good at abstract thought or allegory. Object lessons, besides being over their heads, are often theologically incorrect. The children can become a source of entertainment... and they know it. If you are not up to overcoming these obstacles with your limited preparation time, then here are some suggestions to meet some of those needs in different ways:

- ◇ Sing a Christian children's song in each service. Examples include: "When I am afraid, I will Trust in You," "He's Still Working on Me," "Be Careful Little Eyes What You See." You could re-use some of the past summer's Vacation Bible School music. These songs have a way of speaking simple, foundational truths to the spirits of children and adults.
- ◇ Tell Bible Stories in your sermons, straight through without stopping to apply or explain. Bible stories give people a mental picture of what biblical principles would look like in real life. You won't bore their parents; most of them don't know their Bible stories either.
- ◇ Use testimonies in the services. What you grow up with is what you think is normal. Testimonies help provides an atmosphere of a good normal for children. Some have never seen a Christian grandfather.

Translation: Use the same translation to preach as is used in the Sunday School curriculum your church uses. Have copies of the same translation for your pew Bibles.

The song is supposed to help us think about the Lord; so, don't talk about the song:

Instead of telling the history of the song or who first recorded it, let the song speak for itself. Wouldn't it be better to introduce "Jesus Paid it All" by quoting 1 John 1:9 — "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" — than to start, "Here's a new arrangement we just learned..." Transitions can be important; we need to give them some thought and they need to help the congregation worship God.

How to teach a new song: A congregation will sing anything they have heard the choir (or praise team sing). Not everyone listens to Christian radio, but you can familiarize the congregation with the song by having the pianist play it for an offertory or including it in the playlist used before the service starts. Let them hear the song in some of these ways several times before you sing it in church. That

BONUS MATERIAL

WORSHIP AS JESUS EXPERIENCED IT IN THE SYNAGOGUE

*He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up.
As usual, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read.
Luke 4:16*

During the Babylonian exile, with the temple laying in ruins back home in Jerusalem, the captive Jewish people created Synagogues (the word means to *gather together*). In these places, they could carry on their worship of the one true God. They could not offer sacrifices, but it would enable them to perpetuate their faith through future generations. The movement caught on quickly and endured after the return from the captivity, so that by Jesus' time, synagogues were everywhere Jews lived, even among Jews who were dispersed around the Mediterranean.

The synagogues had a common basic architecture which featured a raised platform, called the *bimah*, in the center. There was a lectern for reading the scrolls of Scripture. The scrolls were kept in a special cabinet called the *ark*. Near the ark and facing the congregation was seating for the important scribes and Pharisees known as the "the seat of Moses" (Matthew 23:2). Men and women entered through separate entrances and were seated separately.

Each synagogue was ruled by a group of elders, one of whom was the chief ruler. He would ask a member of the congregation or an out-of-town guest to speak in the service, as seen in Jesus (Luke 4:16-21; Matthew 4:23; John 18:20) and the Apostles (Acts 13:15-41). For this sabbath, this person was the delegated *Messenger of the Congregation*.

As one considers the similarities of our church worship services to the synagogue services in the days of Jesus and the Apostles, one can easily see how "The Synagogue became the cradle of the Church."¹

Basic Order of Service in the First Century Synagogue:

1. Two Opening Prayers
2. Reciting the "Shema" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 which begins "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one!")
3. A series of 18 prayers, nicknamed "The Eighteen," which praise the Lord and seek his blessing
4. Readings from the Torah (The Law, Genesis through Deuteronomy). Seven readers from the congregation, beginning with a priest or Levite, read passages following a lectionary (a reading plan which took them through the entire Torah over a specified period of time) (Acts 15:21).
5. Reading from the Prophets
6. Sermon: The synagogue rulers would decide who was to read from the prophets and then give the sermon. A different person would be chosen to lead each week.
7. Benediction (Blessing the people): Led by a priest, if present, with uplifted hands, facing the congregation (unlike other prayers which faced the direction of the Temple. From Numbers 6:23-26.
8. The Last Eulogy, a prayer of praise

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1 (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), 431.

WORSHIP AS JESUS EXPERIENCED IT IN THE SYNAGOGUE

The Prayers:

Each of the prayers in the synagogue services were each about a long paragraph in length and were mostly prayers of praise. These are prayers Jesus would have heard at the synagogue and prayers which he would have led. Below are some examples:

The second of the two opening prayers:

'With great love hast Thou loved us, O Lord our God, and with much overflowing pity hast Thou pitied us, our Father and our King. For the sake of our fathers who trusted in Thee, and Thou taughtest them the statutes of life, have mercy upon us, and teach us. Enlighten our eyes in Thy Law; cause our hearts to cleave to Thy commandments; unite our hearts to love and fear Thy Name, and we shall not be put to shame, world without end. For Thou art a God Who prearest salvation, and us hast Thou chosen from among all nations and tongues, and hast in truth brought us near to Thy great Name—Selah—that we may lovingly praise Thee and Thy Unity. Blessed be the Lord, Who in love chose His people Israel.' ¹

You notice in this prayer, with the praise, the request for God to enable the congregation to understand his word and to cause their hearts respond to God and his word, content one might expect to in an invocation at the beginning of a Christian service. The first sentence may remind one of Ephesians 2:5: “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us” (NKJV) .

The first of the eighteen prayers:

'Blessed be the Lord our God, and the God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; the Great, the Mighty, and the Terrible God, the Most High God, Who showeth mercy and kindness, Who createth all things, Who remembereth the gracious promises to the fathers, and bringeth a Saviour to their children's children, for His own Name's sake, in love. O King, Helper, Saviour, and Shield! Blessed art Thou, O Jehovah, the Shield of Abraham.'

Did you pick up on the praise for God “who bringeth a Saviour to [the Fathers'] children's children, for His own Name's sake”? Jesus grew up attending synagogue, hearing that prayer prayed every week!

Some Observations:

- ◇ Jesus attended synagogue on the sabbath, “as was his custom” (Luke 4:16), KJV).
- ◇ There is a plan for taking people through the whole Word of God; they didn't just pick the same favorite passages over and over again.
- ◇ There is a strong emphasis on prayer. Jesus reminded us at the Temple, “My house shall be called a house of prayer” (Matthew 21:13).
- ◇ Members of the synagogue were asked to participate in synagogue services and were capable of doing so.

¹ “Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, vol. 1 (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), 439–440.

² Edersheim, pages 440-441.

TYPES OF PRAYERS IN WORSHIP SERVICES

Imagine that you have been asked to be the spokesman for a group which would be meeting with the president of the United States. Would you try to have your thoughts organized before you entered the room? Would you be sure to speak with the proper terms of respect? Would you try to express, on behalf of the group, their needs and requests? When we lead in public prayer, we are serving as a spokesman of the group before a great King! So, it is important that we represent our flocks well in public prayer during church worship services.

Below are some words frequently used in church bulletins for prayers in different parts of worship services. Each is defined and described.

◇ **Invocation:**

Literally, To call in. A request for the spiritual presence and blessing of God in a worship service.

- ◇ Start with praise
- ◇ Express trust
- ◇ Seeks help from God
- ◇ Relatively brief

◇ **Offertory:**

To offer. Expresses that the gifts are being offered to God as an act of worship, asks Him to accept the gifts, and asks Him to use the gifts to accomplish His purposes in the world.

- ◇ Acknowledge God's provision
- ◇ Pray for specific ministries and persons supported by the offering.
- ◇ This is a brief prayer.

◇ **Benediction:**

(Latin: bene, well + dicere, to speak) A prayer for God's blessing upon the people in attendance. In some churches this refers to a prayer prayed to God at the conclusion and in others it refers to the minister speaking words of blessing over the people.

- ◇ Speaking blessing over the people — an example: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen." (2 Corinthians 13:14, NKJV)
- ◇ Closing Prayer: Ask God to use the Word and encouragement received during the service in our lives

◇ **Pastoral Prayer:**

This prayer, as its name indicates, is usually prayed by the pastor in the worship service. It is prayed both for and on behalf of the congregation.

- ◇ This is a longest type of prayer listed. It expresses worship, helps people enter the big presence of God with our comparably little problems, and takes people into the throne room of God. It intercedes in a general way for people and their needs.

LEARNING ABOUT WORSHIP FROM CHURCH HISTORY

If the role of the worship leader involves *helping our members get a glimpse of God and giving them opportunities to respond to him in obedience and surrender, adoration, and praise* — then, where do we find ideas for ways to help people respond to God in worship? Where do we begin? We start with the Bible, of course!

Sinclair Ferguson says there are two questions we need to ask as we plan our worship services:

- “How has God revealed to us what his pleasure is in worship?”
- “How can we work that out in practical terms in our own congregations, so that everything is done for the glory of God and the edification of the saints?”

When we fail to ask these fundamental questions, and consequently do not probe Scripture to find answers, our approach to worship (that is, *to God*) will be in danger of becoming simply pragmatic, even a relatively thoughtless imitation of “what works,” or even seems “cool” in some other church. ¹

For two thousand years now, Christian leaders have had to think about how to lead worship and how to provide opportunities to their members to respond to God in worship. Whatever we do, we must evaluate our approach in the light of Scripture... but we can learn from these Christian brothers, even if they lived long ago or spoke different languages. Their terminology may be different and even sound stuffy to our ears. Some of their approaches may seem outdated. In fact, they date way back in church history and many of these practices are still being observed today—for example, by some Bible-believing Anglicans and Reformed churches.

Even as we hear them use a term like *liturgy*, many of us cannot imagine that we could learn anything *from them!* With their robes, they may look to us like characters from a space movie. They often use Latin words in their printed order of service. It all seems so other-worldly! Yet these churches work at involving their people in worship. Ron Rienstra explains the meaning of the word “liturgy”:

The meaning of the word ‘liturgy,’ etymologically, is ‘the work of the people.’ ...It refers to the words and actions, the rites and symbols that comprise the worship of the whole people of God. If you worship on Sunday, and you aren't just attending a show, whatever you're doing is the ‘liturgy.’

By these lights, a congregation's worship is ‘liturgical’ if those worshiping understand who they are and what they're doing. They are not passive spectators observing clerical ministrations; rather, they are active participants... ²

On the following page is a liturgy, an order of service, with its terms defined. As you read through it and look at each item, ask yourself: What do they do? Why are they doing it? What are they trying to accomplish in so doing? Is that in the Bible? If their expression wouldn't make sense in our local culture or in our congregation, is there a way to “translate” it for our people?

¹ Sinclair Ferguson, What We Can Learn from Reformation Worship and Liturgies, www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/studying-reformation-worship-liturgies

² Ron Rienstra, “Liturgical Worship” www.reformedworship.org/blog/liturgical-worship

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Directory of Public Worship, London 1644 ¹

- ◆ **Call to Worship:** The opening sentences, directed toward the people, often including a congregational response. It invites the congregation to focus their minds and hearts to worship God. It is brief, not lengthy. It is not merely intellectual, but appeals to the heart.
- ◆ **Prayer of Approach (or Invocation):** This prayer expresses awe for Almighty God, whom we are about to approach in worship, humbly asking him to enable the congregation to worship him worthily and to bless the congregation through the service. This prayer includes: Adoration, Supplication (request), and Illumination (Asking God to grant understanding as the Scriptures are read and taught).
- ◆ **Metrical Psalm:** A Psalm translated into metric poetry and set to music like a Scripture chorus.
- ◆ **Old Testament Reading**
- ◆ **New Testament Reading**
- ◆ **Prayer of Confession and Intercession**
- ◆ **Sermon**
- ◆ **General Prayer and Lord's Prayer**
- ◆ **[Communion]**
- ◆ **Metrical Psalm**
- ◆ **Blessing (Aaronic or Apostolic)**
 - ◇ **Aaronic Blessing:** Numbers 6:23-26 (KJV)
23 Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them,
24 –26 “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.
 - ◇ **Apostolic:** 2 Corinthians 13:14
“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.”

Other Liturgies May Contain:

- ◇ **Reciting the Apostle's Creed**
- ◇ **Passing of the Peace:** Members leave their seats, turn to our neighbors, grasp their hands, and speak the words, “The peace of the Lord be with you” and receive the words in turn, “And also with you.” It is like the fellowship hymn many churches have, but with specific words to include in their greetings with Christian content. The practice is an expression of our identity as peacemakers (Matthew 5:9; 2 Corinthians 5:20) and serves as a reminder to walk in peace with one another.

¹ <https://www.apuritansmind.com/puritan-worship/reformed-liturgical-services-and-the-puritan-order-of-worship>

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- ◇ **At the Conclusion of Scripture Readings:** The reader will say, “Hear the Word of the Lord” and the congregation will reply, “Thanks be to God.”
- ◇ **Doxology:** *Doxa* mean glory or praise and *logos* means to speak. Usually, this refers to a short hymn written by Thomas Ken in 1674. It begins “Praise God from whom all blessings flow” and ends “Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.” Examples of doxologies in the New Testament can be found in Luke 1:68, 2 Corinthians 1:3f, Ephesians 1:3, and 1 Peter 1:3.
- ◇ **Gloria Patri:** Latin for *Glory Be to the Father* from the first phrase of a short praise hymn of praise to the Trinity, dating to the earliest days of church history. It has been set to music and in the past, has been sung in many Southern Baptist Churches. It is often used as a congregational response.

Is Any of this Stuff in the Bible?

Paul commanded that Scripture be read in the churches:

“Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.” (1 Timothy 4:13, NASB)

Compare: Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27

The Apostles spoke blessings over the people:

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” (Jude 1:24-25, KJV)

Compare: Acts 20:32; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Corinthians 13:13-14

Confessions of Faith: Consider 1 Timothy 3:16. Students of the Bible recognize this as a first century confession of faith:

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” (KJV)

God has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Even though we may choose to use songs with a better tune and omit the Latin titles, is your congregation deliberate in singing songs in praise of the Trinity?

If *we're* not doing any of these things, then maybe *they aren't the weird ones*. Perhaps, we can get an idea or two from some Christians with a more liturgical style. And with a little creativity, we can translate it into the heart language of our own local culture and local church.

Learning From Church History

Translating it Into Southern Baptist

The two examples below are not from a Southern Baptist, but they do give you an idea of putting some liturgical parts of worship into a more understandable and uplifting form.¹

Call to Worship

People of God! Why have you come?

We have come to celebrate God's healing presence among us.

Servants of God! Why have you come?

We have come to be refreshed, to be renewed, to be sent out.

Children of God! Why have you come?

We have come to worship together.

Then let us do so with joy and gladness.

Prayer of Approach

Gracious God, once again you have called us together in this place.

Here we open our hearts and lives before you, here we seek to hear Your life-giving Word.

God in this time of song and prayer and speech,

open our very souls to receive your challenge, open our wills to accept your instruction. Turn our mourning into dancing, replace our sackcloth with garments of joy.

And when our time of worship is ended,

lead us back out into the world to share the Good News with the world around us.

We pray in the name of the One who brought Your healing love, Jesus of Nazareth.

Amen.

Translating Written Prayers:

Baptists have generally felt uncomfortable with written prayers. They don't seem to come from the heart. However, such prayers may give us ideas for praying on point. Take this paragraph, for example, from a "General Prayer of Confession."

ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father; We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us.²

We wouldn't have to read this prayer verbatim to get some ideas for leading a prayer of confession: Start with God and his mercy. Own up to sin. Remember sin's perverse nature: How we are prone to wander like sheep. Its self-will. How offensive it is to God when we break his commandments. Our sins of *omission* as well as *commission*. Sin comes from an unhealthy soul. Such insights can help us pray in a more meaningful way than merely repeating what we've all heard, "Forgive us of our many sins."

¹ Submitted by Gord Waldie, St. Paul's United Church, Grande Prairie, Alberta www.liturgylink.net/2012/02/07/call-to-worship-why-have-you-come

² <https://www.reformedanglican.us/confession-of-sin>

The God Whom We Worship

The Attributes of God

Praise God With Specificity: In explaining the difference between thanksgiving and praise, one might correctly say we thank God for what he does and praise him for who he is. Some, however, use this sentence, “Lord, we just praise you for who you are” as a shortcut in their prayers.

Instead of “just” praising God, wouldn’t we do better to exclaim, extol, boast, or clamorously celebrate? Or on the other hand, fall down trembling, overwhelmed in his holy presence? Does one “just” praise the God of the universe?

The biblical writers praised God for specific attributes. And, as we praise him, we should think of the personal attributes his word reveals about his character and power and mention one or two of them specifically—praising him for those qualities. “I just praise you for who you are” communicates we don’t want to be bothered. What follows is a list of qualities of God for which he can be specifically praised.

God is One: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4, ESV). “There is no God but me” (Isaiah 44:6). When we speak of gods by other names, whose religions describe them with different characteristics than the God of the Christian Bible, then we are not speaking of the same God, only called by another name. First, they are not the same thing, as described. And second, they are not real gods with actual existence, only fictional characters.

God is Triune: There is one God, who reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There are not three Gods, but one. He is not one Person, but three. The Persons of the Trinity exist in perfect communion and inseparable oneness, each possessing the same divine nature, co-eternal and co-equal in majesty. God is not one Person who reveals himself in different ways at different times. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.” (2 Corinthians 13:14, NKJV). “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew

28:19) We are “chosen according to the fore-knowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1-2).

God is Self-Existing: God is self-existing and has existed from eternity past. He did not need to be created; He is self-originated. We need other people and we need God, but God doesn’t need us. “The God who made the world and everything in it — he is Lord of heaven and earth — does not live in shrines made by hands. Neither is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:24-25).

God is Spirit: God is non-material and not able to be seen or touched in a physical sense. Hence, graven images and icons would not only be a violation of the Ten Commandments, they would be a joke. To say God is spirit is to not to say He is less than real; we often think something has to be tangible, observable, and measurable to be real. However, everything on earth we call real is external to us, superficial, and temporary. To the

The Attributes of God

contrary, God is real and the ultimate ground of reality. “God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

God is Invisible: Because God is spirit, “No one has ever seen God” (I John 4:12). He is the one “...whom no one has seen or can see” (I Timothy 6:16). “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible...” (I Timothy 1:17).

God is Immutable: He is not subject to change. He tells us, “I the LORD do not change” (Malachi 3:6, ESV). He isn’t moody, but rather is reliable. “...the Father of lights who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8)

God is All Powerful: Fifty-eight times in Scripture God is called by the name “Almighty.” “Oh, Lord GOD! You Yourself made the heavens and earth by Your great power and with Your outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for You!” (Jeremiah 32:17) Naturally, God acts in a way that is consistent with his own holy nature and with his eternal plan.

God is Creator: God is the uncreated Creator of everything visible and invisible. This is so significant, it is appropriate to refer to God as “the Creator,” as if it were His name. God created everything in the universe out of nothing, by merely commanding everything to exist— “...for He commanded, and they were created” (Psalm 148:5). “Come, let’s worship and bow down; let’s kneel before the LORD our Maker.” (Psalm 95:6)

God is Transcendent: God is above and beyond our highest conceptions. This is not to say God is a much bigger version of something with which we are familiar. When we compare God to

the greatest and most powerful things we know, we represent God as far too small. Nine times the Bible says there is “none like” God. Isaiah asks, “With whom will you compare God? What likeness will you set up for compare comparison with him?” (Isaiah 40:18).

God is Personal: God is a personal being, not a force of cosmic energy, like in Star Wars. God is distinct from—and not part of—the creation. He is not at one with the universe; He created the universe! We know God reverently and respectfully, but He *can* be known; we can have a personal relationship with Him. As Jesus prayed, “This is eternal life: that they may know You” (John 17:3). Scripture describes God as having personal qualities and emotions: Love (“His great love that He had for us”—Ephesians 2:4), anger (“When You are angry, who can stand before You?”—Psalm 76:7), compassion (“As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.”—Psalm 103:13), and grief (“How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness and grieved Him in the desert.”—Psalm 78:40) are but a few examples.

God is All-Knowing: God knows history, even that part of it that hasn’t happened yet... everything past, present, and future. “He reveals the deep and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness...” (Daniel 2:22). God knows us. He knows every thought and motive of every person. “The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, observing the wicked and the good.” (Proverbs 15:3) “No creature is hidden from Him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.” (Hebrews 4:13)

The Attributes of God

God is Perfectly Wise: God's wisdom goes beyond His omniscience. We all have had the experience of knowing all the relevant facts and still making the wrong decision. Wisdom involves using information correctly. In His wisdom God created the world: "The Lord founded the earth by wisdom and established the heavens by understanding (Proverbs 3:19). God, by His wisdom, will achieve all of His purposes and will bring glory to Himself! "This is so that God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens" (Ephesians 3:10).

God is Omni-Present: In regard to size, space, and places, God is unbounded and unlimited. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" —the LORD's declaration" (Jeremiah 23:24). We may attempt to hide ourselves from God. "Jonah got up to flee to Tarshish from the LORD's presence" (Jonah 1:3) but discovered that one can run, but cannot hide from God. The Psalmist asked, "Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" (Psalm 139:7).

The Beauty & Majesty of God: God's goodness gives Him beauty. To say God is majestic is to describe the vast greatness of His power, the expansiveness of His reign, and the indescribable splendor of His person. "Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the splendor and the majesty..." (I Chronicles 29:11) "The Lord reigns! He is robed in majesty; The Lord is robed, enveloped in strength..." (Psalms 93:1). "Splendor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary." (Psalm 96:6)

God is Sovereign: God reigns and rules over history, over nations, over rulers, and over individual lives, with the power and freedom to ac-

complish everything He has purposed to do. "...God is King of all the earth. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on His holy throne" (Psalms 47:7-8). God "... works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:11, NIV).

God Condescends: Condescension is when God stoops down from his exalted position to give attention to sinful and mortal creatures. This is not the same thing as being *condescending* — in the sense of looking down on someone — but is an expression of the kindness of God toward us. "Though the LORD is exalted, He takes note of the humble; but He knows the haughty from a distance." (Psalm 138:6) "Who is like the LORD our God—the One enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?" (Psalm 113:5-6)

God is Gentle: Gentleness is strength under control. In fact, one can show gentleness only from a position of strength. "See, the Lord God comes with strength, and His power establishes His rule... He protects His flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them in the fold of His garment. He gently leads those that are nursing." (Isaiah 40:10-11) "...your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great." (Psalms 18:35, ESV) "Take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves." (Jesus in Matthew 11:29, ESV)

God is Faithful: God sticks with us. He never steps out of character. Even "if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (II Timothy 2:13). He is "A faithful God, without bias, He is righteous and true" (Deut. 32:4). God is faithful to His promises—"For He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23). God

The Attributes of God

is faithful to work within us for spiritual growth (1 Thessalonians 5:24). He is faithful when we are tempted. (1 Corinthians 10:13). God is faithful as we confess our sins (1 John 1:9). God is faithful when we suffer. “Let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while doing what is good” (1 Peter 4:19).

God is a Jealous God: “I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:5). We tend to think of jealousy as a very negative trait, since in human relationships, jealousy is the fear of being replaced. We picture insecure and controlling people who smother others. But to say that God is jealous is to say that He places great value on his relationship with us and is determined to protect that relationship and His own honor.

“You shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” (Exodus 34:14, ESV) “The LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.” (Deuteronomy 4:24)

The God of Truth: God personifies and defines reality. God always tells us the truth about himself, about ourselves, and about the world around us. This is because we have a God “who cannot lie...” (Titus 1:2). “...it is impossible for God to lie...” (Hebrews 6:18). He is the truth-telling God and he is the true God: “...the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know the true One. We are in the true One—that is, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” (1 John 5:20)

God is Holy: To say God is Holy means that he is in a different category than us; he is distinctively different and gloriously clean. “There is no one holy like the Lord. There is no one besides You!...” (1 Samuel 2:2). “Lord, who is like You among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, revered with praises, performing won-

ders?” (Exodus 15:11) “...For I am God and not man, the Holy One among you...” (Hosea 11:9)

God is Just, a God of Justice: The psalmist said, “He judges the world with righteousness; He executes judgment on the nations with uprightness.” (Psalm 9:8) “His judgments are true and righteous...” (Rev. 19:2). “There is no favoritism with Him” (Ephesians 6:9). Arthur Pink wrote, “God has often forgiven sinners, but He never forgives sin...” Either justice was satisfied by Christ taking your punishment for you on the cross or justice will be satisfied as you bear your own punishment in hell—but no sin will go unpunished. Justice will prevail.

God is a God of Wrath: Because all sin is an act of hostility toward God and rebellion against him, he takes it personally—and directs His anger toward those who are responsible for sin. “God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day.” (Psalm 7:11, NIV) “For God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people...” (Romans 1:18) Wrath is specifically mentioned in relationship to those who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ, “The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36).

God’s Patience and Forbearance: Forbearance means “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger...” (Psalms 103:8). “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). “Do you despise the riches of His kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4)

The Attributes of God

God is Love: Some may get the idea that it is just as true to say “Love is God” as it is to say “God is love.” However, we shouldn’t imagine God as a collection of qualities, some more important than others, and then define His entire person according to our favorite quality. Because God has qualities other than love: He is light (1 John 1:5). He is holy (Psalm 99:9). He is judge (Psalm 75:7). He is distinguished by righteousness (Isaiah 5:16).

God’s love for us is lavish. God loves you more than you love yourself! “See what a great a love the Father has given us, that we should be called God’s children — and we are!” (1 John 3:1). God’s love goes beyond mere emotions; it is self-giving and sacrificial. “...Christ also loved us and gave himself up for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God” (Ephesians 5:2)

God is Merciful: God sees us in our pitiful, fallen condition. He sees what sin has wrecked our lives. He sees our distresses in this world. And He is moved to sympathy and to action. God hears the groaning of His people (Exodus 6:5). “He will have pity on the poor and helpless and save the lives of the poor” (Psalm 72:13). “He saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy...” (Titus 3:5). “God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us” (Ephesians 2:4).

God is Gracious: *Justice* is when God gives us exactly what we deserve (hell). *Mercy* is when God doesn’t give us what we deserve. And, *grace* is when God gives us that which we don’t deserve! “For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift” (Ephesians 2:8).

Grace includes divine enablement. We have a gracious God who shows saving grace, who gives sustaining grace, and who supplies serving grace.

“But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.’ Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me.” (II Corinthians 12:9) “Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.” (I Peter 4:10) The acrostic many Christians learned growing up is very much the truth: grace is **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**.

The God of Peace: In Philippians 4, Paul gives counsel on how to experience, “the peace of God” (Philippians 4:7). Then, he says that if we follow his example in these matters, “the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9). The emphasis shifts from the peace of God to the God of peace. “May the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way.” (II Thessalonians 3:16) “Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus... equip you with everything good to do His will...” (Hebrews 13:20-21)

God is Savior: A savior is someone comes to the rescue of another, to deliver the person from a harm from which he, in his own power, is helpless to escape. The Old Testament speaks of God as savior from all kinds of distresses. The Bible specifically speaks of Jesus as our Savior from sin. We are not saved by a plan of salvation. It takes a Savior to save ‘ya. “But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, He saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy...” (Titus 3:4-5) “...Our Savior Christ Jesus... has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (II Timothy 1:10).

The Vocabulary of Praise

Because God has revealed himself to us in many varied aspects of his person, power, and divine nature, the Bible uses numerous terms for the varying ways we respond to him in worship, according to the glimpse of God we have been given.

Five Things Praise Does:

1. Praise Fears God Due to His Holiness and Power:

Some would say we should never be afraid of God. There are times in the Bible when God is said to reassure his people, saying “fear not.” However, when a person is not God’s child or when his child is in rebellion, there are good reasons to be afraid of the Lord. “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). At Mount Sinai, at the giving of the Ten Commandments, “The appearance was so terrifying that Moses said, I am trembling with fear” (Hebrews 12:21). Jesus warned us, “Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). God is “other.” God is holy. God is exalted. God is almighty. God is God and we’re not.

Fear: *Fear means fear, not merely “reverence” or respect.*

God is “other.” God is holy. God is exalted. God is almighty. God is God and we’re not.

“Let the whole earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.” (Psalm 33:8). We are instructed not to fear the false gods of this world and what they might do to us if we don’t worship them, “Instead fear the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm” (2 Kings 17:36).

Falling On One’s Face: *The homage paid to persons or beings of superior rank*

“Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen,’ lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground” (Nehemiah 8.6). The word used for worship means to fall prostrate before the Lord.

“All the angels stood around the throne, and along with the elders and the four living creatures they fell facedown before the throne and worshiped God” (Revelation 7:11).

This is a natural response when God reveals himself in power. At the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter is making suggestions when the Father speaks: “‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!’ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown and were terrified” (Matthew 17:5-6).

2. Praise Honors God for His Divine Attributes (or qualities)

Exalt: *To recognize God’s greatness in relation to the universe.*

To exalt God would almost sound as if we were promoting him to a higher level. However, God is already as high up as up can be. Exalting him means we recognize he holds the loftiest position in the universe and describe him in such a way as to acknowledge that fact. “Exalt the Lord our God; bow in worship at his footstool” (Psalm 99:5). “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted

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among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (Psalm 46:10).

Magnify: *In the Old Testament, the word means to make great or large, to hold in high esteem, to magnify.*

In the New Testament, people are said to magnify God when their view of God has just been enlarged. Mary had just been informed by the angel she was to bear the Messiah who would be conceived by a supernatural conception. “And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord’” (Luke 1:46, ESV). Compare: Acts 19:13-20

“Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!” (Psalm 34:3)

“I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving” (Psalm 69:30, ESV).

Glorify: Glory is when the invisible attributes of the invisible God are made visible. During the ministry of Jesus, he would often demonstrate personal qualities of God such as his power to heal. Seeing God’s power to heal and deliver, the natural and spontaneous response of the people was to “glorify” God. “When the crowds saw this, they were awestruck and gave glory to God, who had given such authority to men.” (Matthew 9:8)

“Instantly he could see, and he began to follow him, glorifying God. All the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.” (Luke 18:43)

“Then fear came over everyone, and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen among us,’ and ‘God has visited his people.’” (Luke 7:16)

3. Praise Appreciates the Goodness of God

Thanks: *To express appreciation to God for specific things He has done for us.*

“Give thanks in everything; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Thankfulness is an expression of praise as well as an attitude. “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful” (Colossians 3:15, ESV). In fact, the last days will be marked by many scandalous sins. Among them is being “ungrateful” (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Romans 1:21 lists the failure to give thanks to God as a part of the idolater’s rejection of God and of reality.

Bless: *Thanksgiving responds to the giving of God; blessing responds to the God of giving.*

Blessing is to be grateful to God as the source of all good things, to appreciate God as the *bless-er*.

“Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). “Give thanks to him and bless his name” (Psalm 100:4). “Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously shown his faithful love to me” (Psalm 31:21”).

The Vocabulary of Praise

4. Praise Acknowledges the Wisdom and Justice of God

Confess: *The acknowledgement of the truthfulness and rightness of God.*

Confession of sins is admitting to God: “You are right and I am wrong.” When David confessed his sin, he said, “Against you—you alone—I have sinned and done this evil in your sight. So you are right when you pass sentence; you are blameless when you judge” (Psalm 51:4).

“They read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a fourth of the day and spent another fourth of the day in confession and worship of the Lord their God.” (Nehemiah 9:3)

We can confess our sins; we can also confess truth. And in so doing, we are, again, acknowledging the rightness of God and the truthfulness of the Gospel. “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God...” (1 John 4:2-3). “They will glorify God for your obedient confession of the gospel of Christ” (2 Corinthians 9:13”).

Amen: *In praise, to affirm the truth, rightness, and desirability of God’s ways.*

When the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, the Lord had the people renew the covenant. The leaders of the tribes were divided into two parts. One group pronounced blessings on all who would obey the covenant from Mount Gerizim. The others pronounced curses on all who would disobey God’s covenant from Mount Ebal. For example, the first curse in the list was on any who committed idolatry: “The person who makes a carved idol or cast image, which is detestable to the Lord, the work of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret is cursed.’ And all the people will reply, ‘Amen!’” (Deuteronomy 27:15). The point was not that such a curse was something to be happy about. It would be a bad day, but it was the right thing. Saying “amen” affirms that fact.

Amen can affirm the praises to God of others, also: “‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting.’ then all the people said, ‘Amen’ and ‘Praise the Lord’” (1 Chronicles 16:36). In John’s vision of the throne room of Heaven, there is wave of praise from the entire population there. In response, “The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped” (Revelation 5:14). Amen is also used to underscore praise: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and amen” (Psalm 41:13).

5. Praise Celebrates the Greatness of God

Boast: *To joyfully brag on God for his powerful acts and personal greatness.*

“I will boast in the LORD; the humble will hear and be glad” (Psalm 34:2). “In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever” (Psalm 44:8).

Shout: *Shouting is the response of God’s people to God-given victory*

“Let the whole earth shout joyfully to God! Sing about the glory of his name; make his praise glorious” (Psalm 66:1-2). “May we shout for joy over your salvation, and in the name of our God set up our banners!” (Psalm 20:5)



