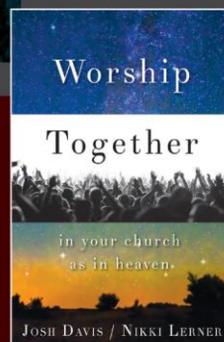
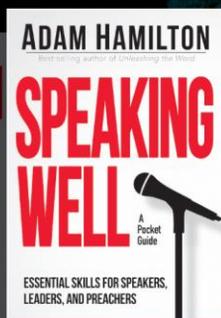
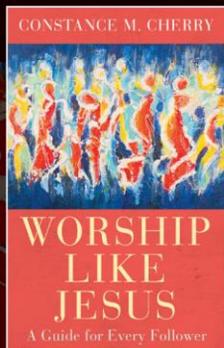
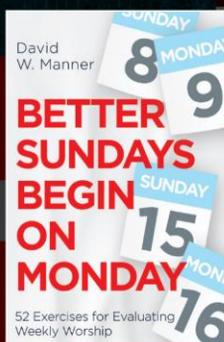
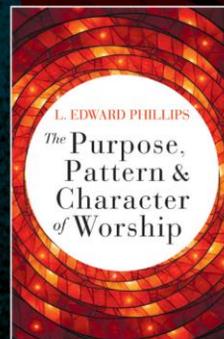
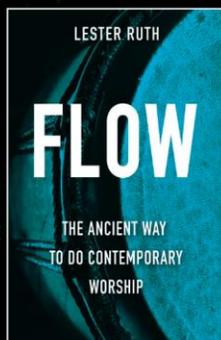
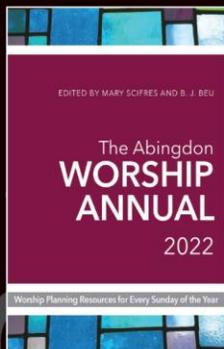
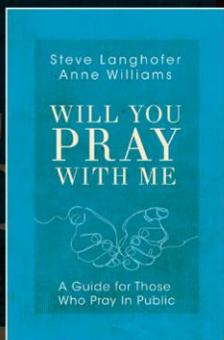


ABINGDON WORSHIP Planning Sampler



ABINGDON WORSHIP Planning Sampler

What changes will you make this fall to refresh and renew your services of worship?

Will your plans include people worshiping remotely and in person?

How might you use time this summer to take stock, evaluate, and analyze your worship?

How might you reinvent your worship practices to involve more people and to teach the true meaning of worship?

This year, after facing so many challenges, the return to worship, study, and fellowship will be especially sweet for many congregations. Summertime is a chance to reflect on all you have experienced and learned, and to listen for God's voice as you plan for the months to come. You might see how some of the habits you were 'forced' into last year are productive and healthy. You might see some new weaknesses or gaps. You might explore a radically new approach for worship in your community.

We encourage you to set aside time this summer for yourself and your worship teams to reflect and plan. To help you with that work, we invite you to look at the books in this sampler. Read a few sample chapters and choose a book to study. We believe at least one of these resources will provide the focus you need as you envision a deeply meaningful, joyous return to worship this fall.

**Will You Pray with Me:
A Guide for Those Who Pray in Public**

Steve Langhofer and Anne Williams

9781791013431 | \$18.99 | September 2021 publication

**Abingdon
Worship Annual 2022**

Mary Scifres and B. J. Beu, editors

9781791010669 | \$27.99

**Flow: The Ancient Way to Do
Contemporary Worship**

Lester Ruth

9781501898990 | \$19.99

**The Purpose, Pattern & Character
of Worship**

L. Edward Phillips

9781791004682 | \$39.99

**Better Sundays Begin on Monday:
52 Exercises for Evaluating Weekly Worship**

David W. Manner

9781791004736 | \$19.99

**Worship Like Jesus:
A Guide for Every Follower**

Constance M. Cherry

9781501881473 | \$17.99

**Speaking Well: Essential Skills for Speakers,
Leaders, and Preachers**

Adam Hamilton

9781501809934 | \$14.99

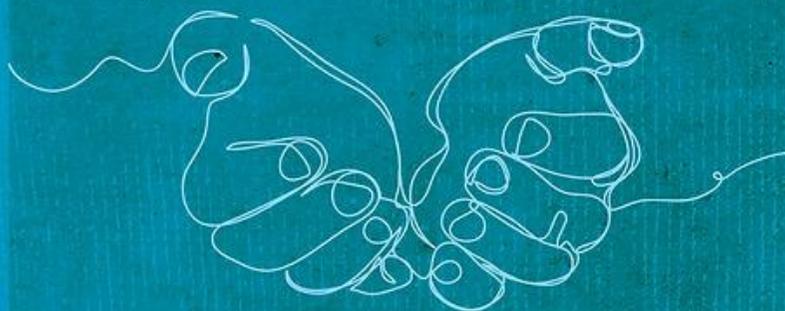
**Worship Together in Your Church as in
Heaven**

Josh Davis and Nikki Lerner

9781630884284 | \$22.99

Steve Langhofer
Anne Williams

WILL YOU
PRAY
WITH ME



A Guide for Those
Who Pray In Public

Chapter One

Guiding Principles for Prayer-Writing

Where to Begin

How does one best begin writing? Start with a posture of humility. Light a candle. Seek the mind of Christ. Pray to be ushered into the mystery of co-creating with God, a grace-filled process surpassing our understanding. Acknowledge this as a holy privilege to which God has called us.

We need an initial idea. Perhaps we feel richly blessed, so we start there. Perhaps a current event dominates the weekly news, and we begin there. Sometimes a neighbor is struggling with depression, a loved one is seriously ill, a dear friend dies, and we find it hard to think about anything else. Sometimes we don't have a clue. A beginning point is imperative.

All too often we enter the composition process feeling uncertain where to start. It helps to offer a prayer something like this:

Jesus, help me know where to start. Help me remember my experiences of this week and the insights You've given me. Help me imagine myself standing before Your altar table, lifting to You the joys and concerns of the ones I've encountered. Put me in touch again with their heartaches, their happiness. Reveal to me what You would have me say on their behalf. Please, Holy Spirit, show me the way.

We receive great comfort in remembering we never craft our pastoral prayers alone. We have a Helpmate (John 14:16-17, 26), an Advocate when we don't know what to pray. One who intercedes on our behalf with deep sighs and unexpressed groans (Rom 8:26-27). When a precise word is essential, it will be provided. And if it is not, it wasn't essential.

When we labor diligently on our prayers, occasionally following worship someone will express appreciation. We are wise to simply smile and quietly thank them. For an instant we can allow ourselves to bask in the glow of satisfaction. The prayer has fed us and them, perhaps not unlike Jesus saying to his disciples, "I have food to eat that you don't know about." (John 4:32). Writing a prayer

can nourish us. We can take appropriate pride in the results of our labor, all the time remembering it was not our own doing.

Mostly we are proud of God who provided every word that came out of our mouths and who promised they would not return empty (Isa 55:11). We are proud of God who refuses to be God apart from us, who uses us to continue creating something out of nothing (John 14:12). What amazing grace! And most amazing of all is that we get to be part of it!

Thank You, O God, for being You, and for loving us the way You do. Make us who lead others in prayer worthy not only of praying to You, but also for Your daughters and sons. Keep speaking. We'll keep listening. Keep giving us Your words of grace and truth, accomplishing far more than we could ask or imagine.

Writing Out the Prayer

Coming up with prayers is a labor of love. It doesn't always come easily, and it can seem to take too long. Some days we think, "I don't have time to write out my prayer. I'll just wing it and trust the guidance of the Holy Spirit." Yes, Jesus did counsel us not to worry beforehand about our words when called upon to speak publicly, that God's spirit would provide (Mark 13:11). But he was talking about crisis situations demanding an immediate proclamation of the gospel. Normally we are not under such pressure. We have time to reflect and choose words carefully.

We want to present the very best expressions possible, demonstrating our love of God with heart, soul, strength, and *mind*! Why would we settle for less? This requires deliberate, thorough preparation. To write out a prayer ahead of time doesn't mean we cannot still deliver it from memory. But the advanced groundwork may well produce a prayer of greater excellence and beauty.

Writing our prayer in advance helps keep us within appropriate time limitations whether in worship, during a meeting or at a hospital bedside. It also gives us the assurance we won't

forget something we really want to say. Making time to write a priority is well worth our effort.

Know Your Goal

Before you begin, you must know why you're doing what you're doing. There are so many ways that a prayer time can be used. Keep your goal in mind to remain focused and deliberate. You'll waste less time and reach a more satisfying conclusion this way.

It is most useful to take time with this question yourself, to determine what you must accomplish by leading your community in prayer, especially if it is a role that you will be occupying for any length of time, or with regularity. Some questions to consider are: Why is a prayer time included in your worship service at all? and What do you feel God is calling you to do with this opportunity?

After some consideration, your answers to these questions will guide you in moments when you are stuck, moments where you are forced to make difficult decisions about what to include or not include. Your thoughtful preparation will ultimately help your congregation feel led with clear direction. In any case, no matter what your goal is, a few things are certain. Your goal is *not* to sit on a high horse of religiosity and show your community how holy you are. Your goal is *not* to shame or guilt others through prayer. Your goal is *not* to preach a mini-sermon. Your goal is *not* to bring an agenda and manipulate others to fall in line with the leader. Your goal is *never* to misrepresent God or create a stumbling block in someone else's faith life.

Here's something to consider as part of your discernment: the leader of public prayer facilitates a conversation between the group and God. You are tasked with the remarkable privilege of giving voice to those praying along with you. You help the gathered people put words to what they are feeling about their faith life, and about life in general. Maybe you inch them forward in their faith

with a bit of a challenge here or there, or with a thought or phrase that gives them pause. A little nudging is helpful from time to time.

So, what *is* your goal as the one offering a public prayer on behalf of a gathered group? One possible response is: **Your goal as a prayer leader is to facilitate a conversation between the group and God.** You are tasked with the remarkable privilege of giving voice to those praying along with you. Your goal is to help your community put words to what they are feeling about their faith life. Maybe you help them move forward by offering a bit of a challenge, or by voicing a thought or phrase that creates the space for a thoughtful pause. A little nudging, from time to time, is helpful.

More often than not, especially in the context of a worship service, your goal is to **represent the community to God, lifting the prayers of the people.** You offer to God words that convey the thoughts and feelings of the people who are gathered, their burdens and joys. When our pastoral prayers achieve this goal, congregants are able to connect with God more fully. They might think to themselves, “I have been feeling that exact thing, but I didn’t know how to express it to God!” What an opportunity we have to facilitate people’s honest self-expression to God, allowing them to voice lament, doubt, or fear.

In *Life Together*, the Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote about the importance of one person praying for others in Christian community:

It is his (her) responsibility to pray for the fellowship. So he will have to share the daily life of the fellowship; he must know the cares, the needs, the joys and thanksgivings, the petitions and hopes of the others. Their work and everything they bring with them must not be unknown to him. He prays as a brother among brothers. It will require practice and watchfulness, if he is not to confuse his own heart with the heart of the fellowship, if he is really to be guided solely by his responsibility to pray for the fellowship. (p. 63)

Another possible response is: **your goal as a prayer leader is to help prepare the congregation to hear the message of the sermon or experience the remaining elements of the worship service.** Perhaps a confession is necessary, or perhaps the congregation can’t make room for more information or teaching until they know God has heard and received

whatever concerns they walked into the sanctuary carrying. The prayer, then, is an opportunity to release and surrender those burdens and create space in the spirit for whatever is to be received by later elements of worship. In this situation, you think of the prayer as one element of a larger worship arc. That arc is heading in a particular direction and the prayer plays a specific role in building the desired experience throughout the hour of corporate worship.

It is important to remember that each different prayer assignment has its own context. The group's needs and your goal for leading them in prayer will require reevaluation. Each time you sit down before an open journal or a blank document to craft a prayer is a chance to pause, reflect, and remember why you are leading this community in prayer.

Imagine God's Perspective

We must keep the needs of our hearers in mind, along with our goal for the prayer. But it is also important as we prepare a prayer to try as best as we can to view the task from God's perspective. What concerns God—in the world and in this community of people? Where is God present in small moments and in massive sweeps of time, and how might our prayer reconnect people with God by recalling those moments? These four habits can help us imagine God's perspective:

Stay Tuned to What's Going on in the World. What is being reported in the news?

Have there been tragedies? What are the current controversies? We hope to learn from as many perspectives as possible about what people might bring with them into the sanctuary. Try to imagine what breaks God's heart as God watches over us as we pursue our self-centered agendas or drive our lives into a ditch.

What meetings did we attend this week? What topics might hold relevance to daily living, such as church finances, children's ministry, recovery support groups, mission trips, marches for social justice, or a special worship service for senior adults living with dementia? Always keep listening to those speaking, to our own thoughts and feelings, and to God's still small voice (1 Kgs 19:12). Like the boy Samuel we plead, "Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:9). Listen to what is being shared with us in crowded hallway conversations. Listen during that hour of

counseling or at a hospital bedside when a sister or brother pours out their soul. Listen to identify concerns with universal application, while carefully honoring each person's privacy.

Has someone just confessed a threatening indiscretion? Did somebody lose their job? Does a cancer sufferer no longer believe in God? Is a long-time member ready to leave the church because we keep ignoring the suffering of people on the edges, or because church politics have become too progressive? What are we hearing, and what is not being said that deserves a voice? This is all prayer material. Take notes. What images and metaphors are surfacing? Are we reminded of scenes from movies, songs, or stories from sports, literature, or history?

Practice. It takes time to develop these habits. Be patient with yourself.

Pay Attention. The potential sources that shape a pastoral prayer are limitless. My father (Steve) used to say, "Son, you'll learn something every day if you pay attention!" We miss too much. We cannot include everything every time. Great lines we are proud of writing end up on the cutting room floor, saved for another week perhaps. That is why we keep files.

Regularly Read the Psalms. This is the great prayer book of our spiritual ancestors, a remarkable window into God's eternal presence in the world. For good reason, Jesus memorized these prayers. They are useful for us in prayer-writing, too. We can imagine, for instance, how we might work the opening verses of Psalm 139 into our prayer: "O gracious Lord, You have searched us thoroughly. You understand us better than we'll ever understand ourselves. You know our thoughts, our ambitions, our worries and fears."

Or apply Psalm 51: "Have mercy upon us, O God. As we open our hearts before You, receive our confessions. Wash us. Cleanse us from our sins. Forgive us when we miss the mark." Why not borrow thoughts from some of the greatest prayers ever written, paraphrasing them into our own words, words God can use and that people can grasp?

Keep a Prayer Journal. This is a mechanism for you to invite, and listen to, God's voice intentionally. It is an opportunity to discern God's perspective. Write your own prayer concerns, bits of prayer, full length litanies—whatever resonates with you. Include things that move you to tears of sadness or joy. If you gain a new self-awareness, write it down. If God surprises you with an experience or an idea, that goes in. Sometimes a particular word, phrase, or sentence is given to us.

Try always to anchor journal entries with a scripture reference that keeps you humble and connected to our tradition. We are not the first to walk these valleys and plateaus.

Understand the People and the Setting

To write a meaningful prayer you must know your audience and the situation they are in. Of course, your prayers will be written out of your own experience, but this book specifically addresses the task of leading a corporate prayer. This requires thoughtful consideration of context and people in the room.

Many of you are charged with writing and leading pastoral prayers for corporate worship in a local church, so the answer may seem obvious. But you must dig a little deeper: Who are they? What jobs do they occupy? What is their home life like? What is their faith background? What is their biblical literacy like? What challenges do they face in daily life?

To take it another step farther, create mock profiles of imaginary people you will be leading in prayer. One might be a single mom with two young children at home, working a minimum-wage job and looking worn and sick when she walks into the sanctuary Sunday morning. She is questioning her faith and whether she believes in God, but it is well worth her time to have an hour of quiet. Plus, her children beg her to come to Sunday school each week. Another one might be a recently retired executive and top-dog in town. He touts that he is excited for his frequent tee times at the local country club but, underneath it all, he is scared of a new routine and questioning his identity now that his career has come to an end. Make a few profiles of your own. Name them. Imagine them coming into worship, ardently seeking connection with the divine. For what do they need you to pray? How can you offer a prayer that nurtures and guides them into an honest self-expression to God, rather than lulls them to sleep?

You may be called to write and lead prayer for other settings as well. The audiences at a recovery center, high school commencement ceremony, civic community event, youth group, or a third-grade Sunday school class are distinct from one another. Do your best to understand these people and their needs, and to cater your prayer to them specifically. Do a bit of research if necessary. Make

a phone call or send a few emails. The minimal time you spend will be remarkably helpful. You'll learn to "read the room" before you're even in the room. Once you have a basic understanding of the people and the situation, you'll be able to discern how best to lead them in prayer. When people arrive at this event or in this setting, what will they be thinking, feeling? What stressors will they bring in the room with them? What connection to faith will they have? How will they feel about a prayer being offered at all? The more you can put yourselves into the shoes of your audience, the greater the chance you will offer a prayer that reflects the hearts of those on whose behalf you pray.

Once you've begun to understand the people and the setting, you can begin to zero in on the prayer itself. Consider these questions:

What kinds of language would it be best to use? Be intentional about the vocabulary you use. Even if you have a theological term in mind that would be perfect to use, avoid it at all costs. Your seminary professor would be impressed, but everyone else will be zoning out. (Except in the case of leading a prayer for your local seminary's weekly worship service, perhaps.) Instead, keep the intention of that thought. Define it, use a layman's description of that same concept and people will jump on board immediately. Use a thesaurus if you need to. It's not cheating, it's using your resources! The term *sanctification*, for example, feels haughty and overly religious. *Transformation*, on the other hand, is relatable and approachable. (We will cover word-choice in greater detail in subsequent chapters.)

What would be tone-deaf or off-putting? What would make the whole room cringe, if you were to mention it? At the graveside service of a congregant who passed away of a heart attack, don't pray a line about how "we are heartsick over the grief that we face . . ." When leading a worship service at the local dementia care facility, where most residents are confined to a wheelchair, avoid using phrases in your prayer like "Give us courage to stand up for what we believe in . . ." Context matters and what works in some situations will absolutely fail in others!

It hurts when we get this wrong. I (Anne) was officiating the memorial service of a young man who had passed away tragically and unexpectedly. From my time spent with the family prior to the service, I knew they were distraught that their loved one had not been baptized. Yet, there I stood,

ill-prepared and bumbling with my script when I began to read the United Methodist prayer traditionally offered at the graveside:

Dying, Christ destroyed our death.

Rising, Christ restored our life.

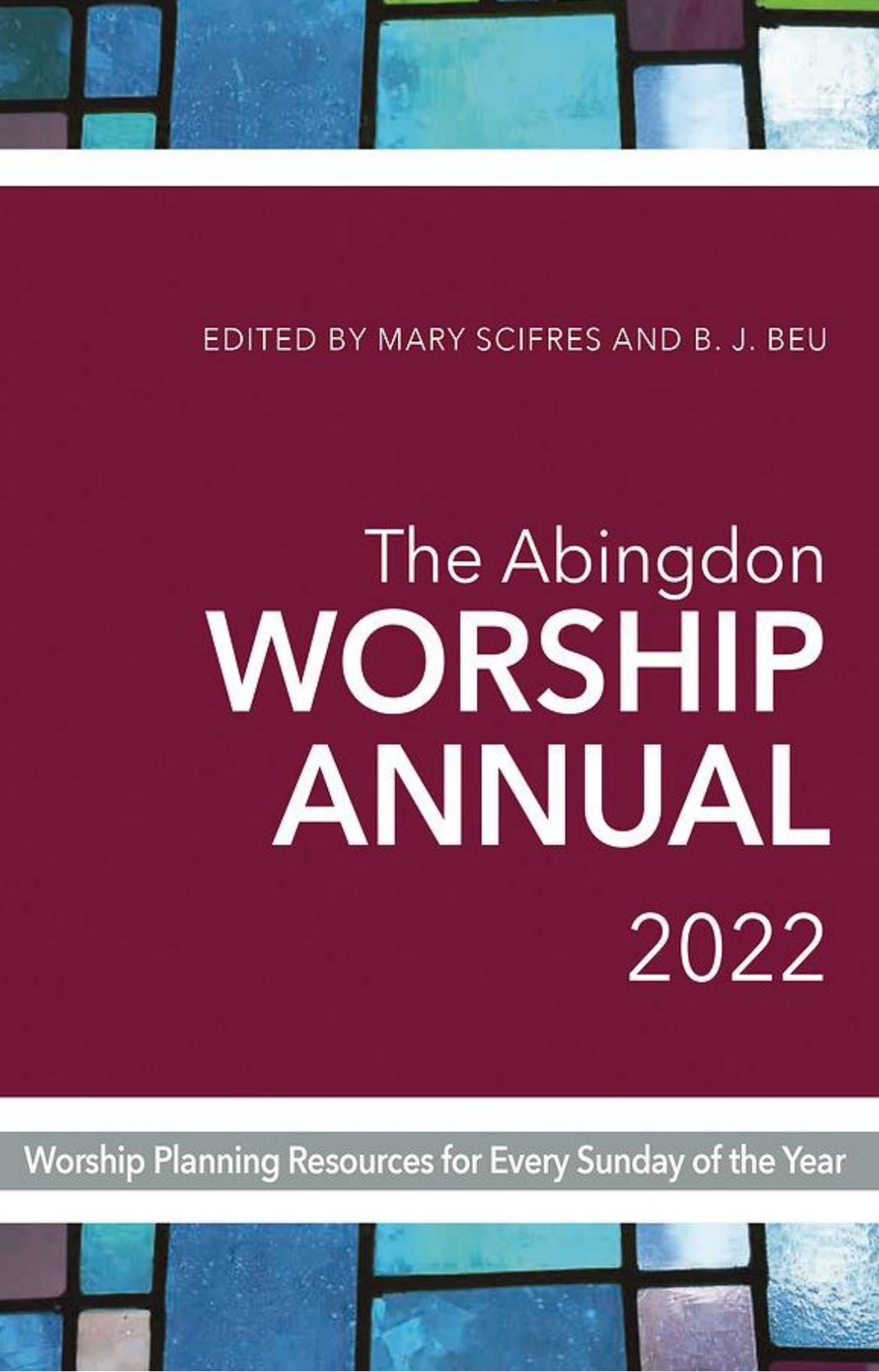
Christ will come again in glory.

As in baptism Name put on Christ,

so in Christ may Name be clothed with glory.

The implication in this prayer was that this man, their deceased beloved, would only gain access to heavenly glory *if* he'd been baptized. I had no intention of leading a prayer or guiding a service that would create concern about his entrance into eternal life with Christ. My hope, in fact, had been to offer peace, comfort, and grace. But my words were careless. I simply took the script I was accustomed to using, and cut and pasted it into my script for this particular occasion. Even if you are re-using prayers that you have prayed many other times in many other situations, I caution you to avoid cutting and pasting. Read through the words. Think about the words. Your context matters.

If your prayer indicates that you understand your audience and your setting, this is a sign of respect and thoughtfulness. By considering the people you serve, you are meeting folks where they are. That doesn't mean you have to pretend to be them. We don't recommend acting like a third-grader if you are praying with third-graders in Sunday school. You don't have to pretend to be something you're not. Instead, your role is to show that you know and understand whom you are praying with and to adjust your practices to meet the needs of those you serve.

A decorative border at the top and bottom of the cover features a pattern of stained glass windows. The panes are in various shades of blue, teal, and purple, separated by dark, possibly black, leaded glass lines. The overall effect is reminiscent of a church window.

EDITED BY MARY SCIFRES AND B. J. BEU

The Abingdon
**WORSHIP
ANNUAL**

2022

Worship Planning Resources for Every Sunday of the Year

WORSHIP PLANNING
RESOURCES FOR
EVERY SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

THE
ABINGDON WORSHIP
ANNUAL 2022



EDITED BY
MARY SCIFRES
AND B. J. BEU

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Introduction

Planning Virtual Worship Pandemic or Not!

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Until the global pandemic of 2020, very few of our readers had been planning worship for the virtual world. Some of us livestreamed or recorded worship services for our homebound members, but very few of us put much thought into those virtual options in our creative thinking and planning. Now, almost all of us do. With that in mind, B. J. and I offer some insights and ideas to you, gleaned from your colleagues around the world.

Versions of Virtual Worship

There are many ways of worshipping together, even while worshipping in our homes. For years, homebound and traveling church members have yearned to stay connected with their church families. Now, almost all of us have developed methods for staying connected through our computers, tablets, and phones. We hope you will continue connecting in these virtual ways, even when the dangers of a pandemic have passed. The more we can connect without regard to geography, the more inclusive our worship services and congregational relationships can be. Imagine how much joy we bring our homebound “visitors” when they stream worship right into their living rooms and assisted living apartments. To stay “connected” in the past,

my homebound grandmother had to rely on copies of *The Upper Room* and visits from her pastor. Now, all who can't attend Sunday worship can stay connected with your congregation, thanks to modern technology and the church's amazing willingness and ability to adapt in 2022!

As the pandemic spread around our globe, we watched colleagues without the ability to livestream create amazing possibilities from their smartphones, camcorders, and tablets. The following methods categorize some of the ways you have made virtual worship possible for your people.

1. Prerecorded worship filmed in “one take”—weekly sermons, musical offerings, and so on
2. Prerecorded worship filmed separately in various segments from multiple leaders and locations—distributed as individual elements
3. Prerecorded worship filmed separately in various segments from multiple leaders and locations—edited and distributed as a complete recorded worship service
4. Prerecorded musical offerings filmed from multiple participants and locations—edited into a virtual choir or ensemble
5. Livestreamed sermons, meditations, or devotions
6. Livestreamed worship services, inclusive of sermon, music, and liturgy
7. Video conference worship, using a service like Zoom, to allow for interaction and fellowship in the worship experience

We applaud you for creating such beautiful worship in so many innovative ways! Below, we take a closer look at each of the methods noted above.

Prerecorded worship, weekly sermons, and musical offerings that are filmed in “one take” can be done with a simple smartphone, computer, or basic recording camera. For best results recording with a phone or video, purchase a simple tripod or stand to provide stability for the camera and allow the leader to focus on the words or music you are offering. The one take option, while not as polished as edited versions, allows for both simplicity and authenticity. Be honest with your congregation that this recording is essentially “live,” even though it’s prerecorded. Be honest with yourself that the one take option leaves you more vulnerable as a leader than edited versions. This option frees up an enormous amount of time and cost over methods requiring extensive editing so that worship isn’t the only ministry you have the time or money to provide in a given week. For distribution and communication ideas, see the next paragraph.

Prerecorded worship filmed in various segments from multiple leaders and locations that are distributed as individual elements allows diverse and varied worship moments to be shared with your fellowship throughout the week, rather than as a single service. One pastor walked his deserted streets the first week communities were sheltering at home as his videographer recorded him with a drone video camera. The voiceover (added later) was both haunting and comforting as the pastor shared both his concerns and his hopes for his congregation and our world. Another pastor recorded all of her summer sermons from her dock, with a beautiful lake in the background, taking her congregation through a series of “lakeshore” stories of Jesus and the disciples. In both cases, their churches also distributed links to instrumental and vocal music from their church musicians. One church included weekly links to children’s

messages from volunteers in their Christian education program. When individuals use their own equipment to record these segments, the quality can vary widely. Some churches address this issue by having participants visit the sanctuary at scheduled times so that a videographer can record each segment, or they advise participants in use of common equipment and methods. For example, one church asks each volunteer who records a prayer or song to record it horizontally on a smartphone, using the phone's built-in microphone. Some church administrators and pastors share the links to the various recordings on the church website or in emails with PDF documents. Others post each segment on their social media channels as the segment is created, which allows for spiritual nurture throughout the week. Others wait and send all of the links in a weekly post to create a more unified feel to worship, even when it is created in different segments. Consider sharing prayers and readings from this resource with a variety of volunteer and staff worship leaders throughout your worship year, to expand both participation and creativity in the worship experience. Remind them they are permitted to adapt, edit, or use the resources exactly as they are written in both written and recorded format. Just note the authorship and copyright notice in whatever written communication accompanies your recordings.

Prerecorded worship filmed in various segments from multiple leaders and locations that is edited into one worship service provides a fuller and more familiar worship experience for congregants. As with the previous style, recording from various locations provides a great deal of creativity and variety, but varying sound levels and quality of recordings can present a challenge for your video editor.

Most churches find that the editing is simplified if all recordings are shot in one location using the same equipment, with leaders scheduled at various times to provide for safe physical distancing. This option requires more preparation and planning, along with a paid editor or very generous volunteer who can handle the demands of postproduction editing. Our son Michael Beu, a video editor, works with a number of churches and pastors to manage the technical and time-consuming demands of editing and posting their worship videos, or helps them find volunteers or train staff members to do so. This extra help allows pastors to focus on worship rather than on technology, and many church donors have stepped up to provide the financial support necessary for this new way of providing worship and spiritual nurture.

For the worship experience, some churches “premiere” worship services put together in this way by scheduling the uploaded video to go live at a specific time on their social media channel. This allows and encourages congregants to watch and worship “together” at the same time from their various locations, and also can provide viewers the opportunity for interactive chat on the social media channel, creating a sense of community. This sense of community is increased if the worship service is followed by a virtual fellowship time via video conferencing on platforms like Zoom or Skype. Others “open” the posted worship service video immediately, once editing and uploading is complete, so that worshippers can view and worship whenever they want. One of our readers prefers this latter option, so that her church can join for virtual fellowship and sermon conversation during the normal Sunday morning worship time, having viewed worship the day before.

Prerecorded musical offerings filmed from multiple participants and locations that are edited into a virtual choir or ensemble allow vocal music and ensemble music to continue to be a part of our lives. Solo offerings, however, are much more common because they are more easily achieved with simple recording devices—sometimes connected directly to an electronic musical instrument, other times recorded with the internal microphone provided on the recording device. Most musicians prefer the higher quality of recording with an external microphone, attached to the video recording device. Virtual ensembles require a great deal of postproduction sound editing. It's harder than it looks and sounds, so very few churches choose this option, unless they have a professional studio or advanced sound and video technicians available to them.

Livestreamed sermons, meditations, or devotionals are being offered by churches at all times of day and night around our globe. They can be recorded and offered on almost any social media channel by clicking on their live stream option. One colleague records a daily devotional video, but also posts it in written format on his Facebook page. (He also enlists church leaders to record on Fridays and Saturdays, so he can enjoy sabbath and family time on those days.) Consider using prayers and responsive readings from this resource to enhance devotionals, sermons, or reflective meditations you are providing for your people.

Livestreamed worship services that include sermons, music, and liturgy require recording equipment connected to a live streaming service and, ideally, a wired connection to the internet. Most churches who choose this option have invested considerable money into a streaming broadcast

system and have budget for trained staff members who know how to operate both the recording and broadcasting systems. As with the virtual choir option, this isn't as easy as it looks! But it is a beautiful option for churches that have the ability and the resources. That said, most churches who were streaming before the pandemic have both adapted and improved their livestream worship ministry. Before the pandemic, much of livestreamed worship was either an afterthought of what was already happening on Sundays, or a polished "performance." Now, some of the fanciest livestreams have become the simplest. There is an elegance to this simplicity and this intentionality, when worship is crafted to focus on one primary theme or message. Worship services have been shortened to adapt to the shorter attention span of a virtual congregation. Messages and musical offerings are less polished and more personal, creating intimacy and relationship with viewers at home. Don't be fooled, though! The technology in the background to make livestreaming successful is complex with little room for error, which occurs frequently for a variety of reasons. Those of us who livestream on a regular basis have learned to laugh at ourselves, forgive technology, and patiently await our technicians to address the glitches that inevitably arise. One colleague laughingly posted on our clergy Facebook group, "It's time to designate a 'Glitch Sunday!'"

Video conference worship, using providers like Zoom, provides opportunities for interaction and fellowship during the worship experience. While this format creates a more collaborative environment, it requires more flexibility and informality for both leaders and participants. Best

practice for this format has participants and members log onto the video conference *with a private church link* in order to prevent interruptions by internet trolls. Designate a video conference coordinator to welcome guests, help with password and technology challenges, monitor chat questions or comments, and mute everyone but the participants once worship begins. A video conference coordinator allows pastors, musicians, and worship leaders to focus on their worship responsibilities without having to control the service's complicated technical requirements.

When the pastor and designated leaders are leading, their video feeds should be the only ones with active microphones. This allows people to hear more clearly and participate more fully without interrupting the worship flow. While microphones are muted, congregational singing, unison and responsive readings, and responses to the Spirit are all possible in this format. If you have a solo worship leader, make sure their microphone is always unmuted so that they can lead the singing, readings, and prayers. To add an interactive component, encourage people to comment in their chat box, or even invite conversation following the message by designating a time of unmuted sermon feedback and Q & A. Similarly, community prayer and joys and concerns can be interactive by unmuting members for these worship elements; but be sure to mute the members again before praying the pastoral or Lord's Prayer. Although you can use a webinar format instead, webinars are more "presentation" than "participation," similar to a Facebook Live or YouTube Premiere.

Choosing or Changing Your Version of Virtual Worship

Several decisions need to be made before settling on a method of virtual worship:

1. Whom is God calling your church to reach? What technology are they able and willing to access?
2. What type of worship experience will best serve the congregation you are called to reach?
3. How much is your church able and willing to spend, both in time and money?
4. What technology and distribution platform best address these questions.

With these decisions in mind, you are ready to work with your worship team to create a virtual worship design and choose a platform best suited to your current needs. What you started with need not limit where you go in 2022 and beyond. Similarly, if you've been doing this alone for the last year and a half, you need not continue doing it alone. This is the perfect time to create a worship team that will work with you, supporting and strengthening both the process and creativity of your worship experience. When planned and implemented alone, virtual worship is already leading to many early retirements and departures from ministry. The workload is simply too exhausting and isolating an experience to sustain by one individual, regardless of how talented they are. Reach out to your leadership, your colleagues, and even community partners to find the help you need. If you're reading this article but not on the worship team, check with your pastor or musician to see if they need support and help. Contact us if you need help figuring out how to find and work with a team.

Adapting Music and Liturgy for Social Distancing and Safety

One of the greatest challenges in church worship today has been the limitations placed on vocal music and the spoken word to avoid spreading infection. Yet, limitations give rise to creativity and new ways for musicians to stay involved in ministry. Some vocal choirs have transitioned into bell choirs. Other vocalists have been reading the texts of favorite hymns or anthems, while instrumentalists play the music underneath. Some churches are prerecording vocal music for presentation on screen during live worship, while simultaneously streaming the live worship and the prerecorded music for their virtual worshippers. Responsive and unison readings are not always the safest option for a congregation gathered together, but two readers may “duet” a responsive reading from the chancel while remaining safely distanced from both worshippers and one another. Or again, music might enhance a solo voice reciting the Lord’s Prayer. Looking for more creative ideas? Visit maryscifres.com to find some of the creative ways B. J. and Mary are working to address the changing forms of worship.

Adapting Virtual Worship to a Hybrid Form

Over these last few years, you have likely led worship in a variety of ways, adapting to social restrictions the pandemic has thrown our way. As churches reopen their sanctuaries, while also offering virtual worship, we have begun calling

this new both-and situation *hybrid worship*. Our worship services are no longer just the old fossil-fueled combustion engine of sanctuary worship, but also electric-fueled worship of videos streamed directly into the homes of church members and friends around the globe. One California colleague is helping his newest member from North Carolina get acquainted with her California church family three thousand miles away. When their sanctuary reopens, she will still be worshipping from her North Carolina living room, utilizing the gifts of this hybrid worship model to nourish her spiritual journey across the miles. As congregations again gather for in-person worship, this hybrid model allows us to continue serving our virtual worshippers. To prepare for this, worship leaders have put tech crews in place who can record the services, upload to an online platform, and communicate with the congregation how to access the online service. Your best practice is for worship leaders to focus on the worship components (music, message, liturgy) and for tech and administrative team members to focus on the technology and communication components. Let us know if you have questions or concerns we can help you address, or if you have insights and ideas to share with others.

Mary Scifres and B. J. Beu
admin@maryscifres.com

January 1, 2022

Watch Night/New Year

B. J. Beu

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Color

White

Scripture Readings

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Psalm 8; Revelation 21:1-6a;
Matthew 25:31-46

Theme Ideas

Start with the end in mind. Where are we going, and how do we get there? Matthew reminds us that our actions have eternal consequences. If we truly want to change our lives, we are charged to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, and comfort those who mourn. The new heaven and new earth may be in our midst, but if we want to be part of it, we need to treat each other lovingly. In Ecclesiastes, God reminds us that weeping, tearing down, and lying fallow will always be part of the seasons and rhythms of life. As we look with anticipation to the new year ahead, we place our trust in the one whose glory is beheld in

the new heaven and new earth—the one who will wipe away every tear.

Invitation and Gathering

Centering Words (Ecclesiastes 3)

Through the seasons of life, God walks with us—laughing with us at our follies and foibles, dancing with us in our triumphs, weeping with us in our losses, strengthening us in times of trial. As a new year dawns, know that you never walk alone.

Call to Worship (Ecclesiastes 3, Psalm 8, Matthew 25)

A new day dawns.

**How majestic is God's name
throughout the earth.**

A new season of life begins.

**God's glory shines in the heavens
and shimmers on the waters.**

A new year calls us into Christ's glorious future.

**We will feed the hungry, clothe the naked,
visit the sick and imprisoned,
and see Christ in every face we meet.**

Opening Prayer (Psalm 8, Matthew 25)

Source of love and mercy,

as we enter a new year in the life of this church,
may our love for you be made known
in our love for one another.

Help us leave old grievances in the past
and former arguments behind,

as we open our hearts
to the possibilities that lie before us.

Guide our footsteps into the glory of your ways,
that we may live as beloved children
crowned with glory and honor.
May our worship this day
reflect the greatness of our calling
and the glory of our heritage. Amen.

Proclamation and Response

Prayer of Yearning (Psalm 8, Matthew 25, Revelation 21)

God of memory and promise,
your new heaven and new earth
call us to be more than we have become.
We yearn to enter into fullness of life.
We strive to leave behind our self-centered ways,
focusing instead on those who suffer from hunger,
and those who grow weak from lack of shelter
and warmth.
Curb our temptation to lift up our eyes
from the homeless and the needy,
even as we delight in the starry heavens
and the wonder of your creation.
Set our gaze on the welfare of others,
that we may live with newfound joy
in the promise of your new heaven
and your new earth. Amen.

Words of Assurance (Psalm 8)

The psalmist questions,
What is the human race that God is mindful of us?
Who are we that God cares for us so deeply?

In loving delight, you answer,
You are my children,
whom I have made but a little lower than myself.
I have crowned you with glory and honor,
and I will always love you.

Passing the Peace of Christ (Matthew 25)

Christ comes to us hidden in the sunken eyes of hungry children, the doleful eyes of the sick and imprisoned, and the humiliated eyes of the naked. When we learn to see Christ in these eyes, and then respond accordingly, we find the peace that passes all understanding. Let us gain a taste of this peace, as we see Christ in the hidden hurts of one another. As we share this peace today, we bring the peace of Christ to those in our midst.

Introduction to the Word (Ecclesiastes 3, Matthew 25)

For every thing there is a season.
May this be a season of new possibilities,
as we reflect on God's call to feed the hungry,
clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned,
and comfort those who mourn.

Response to the Word (Ecclesiastes 3)

As we journey through life,
God is always with us.
In seasons of rejoicing,
we do not laugh alone.
In seasons of mourning,
we do not weep alone.
In this season of faithful,
we discover Christ,
as we care for the least and the lost.
Rejoice in this good news.

Thanksgiving and Communion

Offering Prayer (Matthew 25)

Mighty God, as we bring you our offerings,
heal the brokenness we feel inside.

Turn our upturned gaze back to the earth—
toward your needy children,
toward the faces of those who hunger,
toward the sick and imprisoned.

Turn our inward focus onto those in need—
toward the lonely shut-in,
toward the addict looking to get clean,
toward the runaway hoping
to return home,
toward everyone society has left behind.

Only then may we truly see the face of Jesus.

Only then may we help heal our broken world. Amen.

Sending Forth

Benediction (Ecclesiastes 3, Matthew 25)

Every season in life is a blessing from God.

We go forth, rejoicing in God's blessings.

Every purpose under heaven can lead us into life.

We leave to bring about God's purposes.

Every act of kindness is a kindness done to Christ.

**We go, determined to make a difference
in our world.**

January 2, 2022

Epiphany of the Lord

Mary Petrina Boyd

Color

White

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12;
Matthew 2:1-12

Theme Ideas

The magi sought a child who would be a king, but the palace was not home to this child. Instead, when the magi followed the star, they found the child in lowly estate, and were overwhelmed by joy. This is a story of pilgrimage, as we search for God's presence in our lives. This is a story of listening for the voice that draws us beyond the world's image of power. It is a story of the light that guides, us as God's true power overcomes oppression.

Invitation and Gathering

Centering Words (Matthew 2)

In the darkest night, a star shines. Follow this star, for it will lead to overwhelming joy.

Call to Worship (Isaiah 60)

Arise, shine! Your light has come!

Glory to God in the highest.

Darkness covers the earth,

but God's glory shines brightly.

Lift up your eyes. Look around.

The light of God's love shines radiantly.

Arise, shine! Your light has come!

Our hearts thrill and rejoice!

Opening Prayer (Matthew 2)

God of light and love, shine upon our lives,
as we welcome the mystery of your love.

Guide us toward your true gift,

for our hearts long

to encounter with the holy.

Quiet our expectations,

that we might be surprised

by the unexpected.

Open our eyes,

that we might find you

in unanticipated places.

Shine your light upon us,

that we might see you clearly,

and recognize your face

in all people. Amen.

Proclamation and Response

Prayer of Confession (Psalm 72, Matthew 2)

The presents have been opened.

The cookies have been eaten.

The celebrations have left us exhausted.
Yet your Spirit comes again,
 guiding us toward true joy.
In all of our busy celebrations,
 remind us that you desire righteousness and justice
 for world in need of generous hearts.
May the light of Jesus Christ,
 the world's true light, live among us
 and turn our lives from oppressive power
 toward liberation and hope. Amen.

Words of Assurance (Psalm 72)

Like rain that falls upon the grass,
 like showers that water the earth,
 may righteousness and peace abound in our lives
 and in our world.

Passing the Peace of Christ (Isaiah 60)

The light of Christ be with you. The peace of God be
yours.

Response to the Word (Matthew 2)

When the travelers followed the world's wisdom,
 they came to the palace of Herod.
But joy was not there.
When the travelers followed the star,
 they came to the place of the child
 who was the world's hope.
There they were overwhelmed by joy.
Follow the star, which is the light of love;
 it will lead you to deepest joy.

Thanksgiving and Communion

Invitation to the Offering (Matthew 2)

The wise travelers brought their gifts to honor the promised child. Let us bring the gifts of our lives, in gratitude for God's bright light of love.

Offering Prayer (Matthew 2)

Giver of every gift, source of all goodness and light,
we open the treasure chests of our hearts before you.
We offer you gifts of gold,
to care for those in need.
We offer you gifts of love,
to serve a suspicious world.
Bless our gifts and our lives,
and use them to love and heal the world.
Amen.

Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to our God.

It is right to give our joyful thanks and praise.

We thank you, creating God

for the great light of your love.

When you called forth creation, you said,

“Let there be light” and you saw that it was good.

You divided the light from darkness

and created the sun, moon, and stars to light the sky.

It was good, as all your creation was good.

When your people suffered in bondage and oppression,
you led them out of slavery.

You lit the way to freedom with a pillar of cloud by day
and pillar of fire by night.

You gave them your commandments to light their way,
as they strove to become a community of justice
and righteousness.

When your people turned from your light,
you were still faithful, loving them always.

You sent prophets to call them back
to the world's true light.

And so, with your people on earth,
and all the company of heaven,
we sing your praises.

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one
who comes in the name of the Lord.**

Hosanna in the highest.

You sent Jesus to us, the light of the world.

He promised that those who followed him
would never walk in darkness,
but would have the light of life.

The light of his life shone on all people,
revealing the truth of your love.

He fed the hungry, cured the sick, ate with sinners,
and proclaimed your truth.

Before he was betrayed, he gathered with his friends
for a meal.

Taking the bread, he gave thanks to you and broke it.

He gave it to his friends, saying,

“Take and eat. I am with you now and forever.

Let this meal feed you.
Remember me as you eat.”

Then he took the cup, blessed it,
and shared it with his followers, saying,
“This is the cup of the new covenant,
given for the forgiveness of sins.
It is a gift for you and for all people.
It is my love offered for you.
Drink of this and remember me.”

And so, as we remember Jesus, light of the world,
teacher, healer, guide, and friend;
we offer ourselves into Christ’s service,
that we too might radiate God’s light,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Pour out your Spirit upon these gifts of bread and cup,
that they may be for us
the living presence of Jesus Christ,
light of the world,
our hope for all creation.

Pour out your Spirit upon us,
that we may become the body of Christ,
as we serve creation
and reflect the light of your love.

Make us one with Jesus, and one with each other,
as we walk in the light, singing your praises.

Through Jesus Christ, light of the world,
and through the Holy Spirit, radiance divine,
all praise is yours, eternal God,
now and forever, world without end. Amen.

Sending Forth

Benediction (Matthew 2)

As you follow the star on your journey,
don't look for the holy in places of power
and prestige.

Instead, pay attention to the ordinary, the quiet places.
There, may you be overcome with joy,
and share your gifts with creation.

January 9, 2022

Baptism of the Lord

B. J. Beu

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Color

White

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Theme Ideas

The power to protect and redeem Israel (Isaiah 43) is seen in new and vital ways, through the giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8 and Luke 3). The people God called by name, the people God accompanied through fire and water, have been given a new blessing—the power of God’s very Spirit. This blessing is not just for the Jews, but for Samaritans and all who accept Jesus as the Messiah, the chosen one of God. With this blessing, however, comes judgment. The righteous will be gathered to God like wheat to the granary, but the unrighteous will go like chaff to unquenchable fire. The very power of God that brings peace (Psalm 29) is the same power that brings calamity on the unrighteous. These readings

warn us against complacency and being cavalier about our baptism. The awesome power of God's Holy Spirit is nothing to toy with.

Invitation and Gathering

Centering Words (Luke 3)

The Spirit dances in the water, waiting in baptism to join us in the fire of God's love. Come to the waters. Come to the Spirit. Come to the journey of a lifetime—a journey through death to life everlasting.

Call to Worship (Psalm 29, Isaiah 43)

Sing praises to the Lord.

Sing of God's glory and strength.

**God calls us over the waters,
and strengthens us for the journey.**

Sing praises to Christ.

Sing of Christ's healing and love.

**The waters of our baptism cleanse us,
renewing our spirits and nursing our wounds.**

Sing praises to the Spirit.

Sing of the Spirit's comfort and hope.

**The flames of the Spirit are like a refiner's fire,
purifying the soul to the glory of God.**

Opening Prayer (Psalm 8, Matthew 25)

Source of love and mercy,

as we enter a new year in the life of this church,

may our love for you be made known

in our love for one another.

Help us leave old grievances
and former argument behind,
as we open our hearts
to the possibilities that lie before us.
Guide our footsteps into the glory of your ways,
that we may live as you created us to be—
beloved children, crowned with glory and honor.
May our worship reflect the greatness of our calling,
and the honor of our heritage. Amen.

Proclamation and Response

Prayer of Yearning (Luke 3, Acts 8)

Divine Spirit, descend upon us this day,
as you descended upon Jesus
on the day of his baptism.
In the midst of our brokenness,
we long to touch the healing of your Spirit,
as you touch us with your love.
In the presence of evil all around us,
we yearn to be protected by the holy fire
of your sustaining Spirit.
As we remember, with gratitude, our baptism this day,
remind us that we are a people of the water—
a people made one and whole,
through the Spirit made known
in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Words of Assurance (Isaiah 43)

Do not worry, sisters and brothers,
for God has redeemed you
and called you by name.

Do not worry, children of the promise,
for God is with us even now,
gathering the lost into the light
of everlasting love and faithfulness.

Passing the Peace of Christ (Matthew 25)

The one who baptized us with fire and the Holy Spirit
is here to wash away our guilt and pain. Turn to one
another and offer signs of the peace that only Christ can
give.

Introduction to the Word (Luke 3)

Come to the word, seeking the presence
of the living God.

**We come seeking life with Christ
in the promise of our baptism.**

Come to the word, seeking forgiveness
for the hurts you have caused others.

**We come to offer our very selves
as a living sacrifice.**

Come to the word, seeking acceptance,
with hearts ready to be born anew.

We come to receive God's Spirit.

Listen for the word of God.

Response to the Word (Luke 3)

People of God, do you know who you are?

We are God's beloved children.

Disciples of Christ, do you know who you are?

We are the wheat in Christ's granary.

Heirs of the Spirit, do you know who you are?

**We are works of the Spirit,
fashioned into body of Christ.**

Sealed in God's love, through the waters of our baptism,
let us abide in the power of the living God.

Thanksgiving and Communion

Offering Prayer (Psalm 29, Luke 3)

Mighty One, your voice is powerful,
shaking the wilderness
and stripping the forests bare.

Speak words of blessing upon our offering this day,
that nothing may hinder the good our gifts may do
in your name.

Give strength to your people,
through the gifts we bring before you,
that all may know the glory of your Spirit,
through Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Sending Forth

Benediction (Isaiah 43)

Go forth and proclaim the good news:
God calls us by name
and fashions us for glory.

**We go as people washed clean
in the waters of our baptism,**

Go forth and live the good news:
the Holy Spirit blesses us
and seals us in God's love.

**We go as people blessed by God,
that we might be a blessing to others.**

January 16, 2022

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Mary Scifres

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Color

Green

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11;
John 2:1-11

Theme Ideas

God imparts the miracle of transformation in myriad ways: turning a jar of water into wine, imparting divine gifts to us, loving us with a steadfast love that never ends, rescuing us from exile, and restoring us with abundant love. The miracle of transformation flows through our lives, as it does through today's scripture readings.

Invitation and Gathering

Centering Words (John 2, Psalm 36)

Fill the emptiness of your lives with the abundant love of God. Then watch the miracles that follow.

Call to Worship (John 2, 1 Corinthians 12)

Come to the feast.

God welcomes us here.

Come to be fed.

Christ nourishes us with love.

Come to be transformed.

The Spirit re-creates us anew each day.

Opening Prayer (John 2, Psalm 36)

Living Water, flow through our worship.

Nourish us with your loving presence.

Draw us ever closer to you,

that our empty vessels may be filled,

and that our dry souls may be transformed

into fountains of love, life, and joy.

Proclamation and Response

Prayer of Confession (John 2, Isaiah 62)

When hope runs dry, lift us out of despair, O God,

and fill us with the waters of renewal.

When our efforts fall short,

forgive our failings,

and reclaim us with your promise.

When the weight of worry holds us down,

lift us up with your comfort,

and show us the way forward.

Transform our lives,

as you once transformed water into wine,

that we may flow with abundant love.

Transform your creation and your people,

as you once transformed a formless void

into this good and fruitful earth.

In hope and gratitude, we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance (John 2, Psalm 36)

God's steadfast love shines as a fountain of light,
transforming our lives with goodness and grace.
God does this as easily as Christ turned water into wine.

Introduction to the Word (1 Corinthians 12)

Listen for the Spirit to speak to our hearts.

Response to the Word (John 2)

Which jars are running empty in your life?
Where are you yearning for Christ
to turn still waters into flowing wine?
Let us reflect silently together.
(Silent reflection and prayer)
Healing Christ, renew us this day.
Transform us into miracles of your love,
that we may be the miracles
you would have us be. Amen.

Thanksgiving and Communion

Invitation to the Offering (John 2)

Whether your jars are empty or full of wine, whether
your gifts seem mighty or small, they are gifts to be treasured
and shared, just as we are gifts to be treasured
and shared. Let us share ourselves and our gifts with the
world this day.

Offering Prayer (John 2)

Christ of miracles, transform the gifts we return to you,
that they may be gifts of abundant life,
and ever-flowing love,
for a world thirsting for your grace.
In gratitude and joy, we pray. Amen.

Sending Forth

Benediction (John 2)

As we have been filled,

go now to fill the world.

Fill the world with love.

Fill the world with hope.

Fill the world with Christ.

For as we nourish others,

God transforms the world through us.

January 23, 2022

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Deborah Sokolove

Color

Green

Scripture Readings

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19;

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21

Theme Ideas

The passages from Nehemiah and Luke remind us that God's desire for all people includes release from all forms of captivity, whether literal or figurative. They also illustrate God's desire for restoration, wholeness, and healing. For Christians, this wholeness is not just understood individually, but communally as the body of Christ. As Paul puts it, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Cor 12:26 NRSV).

Invitation and Gathering

Centering Words (Psalm 19)

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasant to you, Holy One, our rock and our redeemer.

Call to Worship (Nehemiah 8, Psalm 19, Luke 4)

This day is holy to our God;
do not mourn or weep.

**The Spirit of the Holy One is upon us
to bring good news to the poor.**

This day is holy to our God;
for the joy of the Holy One is our strength.

**God sends us to proclaim release to the captives,
recovery of sight to the blind,
and justice to the oppressed.**

On this day, may the scripture be fulfilled
in our hearing:

**May the words of our mouths
and the meditations of our hearts
be pleasant to you, Holy One,
our rock and our redeemer.**

Opening Prayer (Nehemiah 8, Psalm 19, Luke 4)

Holy maker of stars and planets,
Holy mender of broken dreams,
Holy fountain of joyful news,
we stand in awe of your glory.
We cry out with the psalmist in wonder,
as your word is proclaimed
in the silent song of the cosmos.

We cry out with your faithful ones,
as your presence is made known
in the stories of your people
at all times and places.

When the people returned from captivity in Babylon,
you gave them your precepts to sustain them,
as they rebuilt the city.

When Jesus read the words of your prophets
to his hearers in the synagogue,
he reminded them of your promise
to release captives,
to restore sight to the blind,
and to free the oppressed.

Today, you call us to be members of the body of Christ,
your embodied Word made flesh,
and to offer healing and wholeness
wherever we go.

May our songs and our stories,
our praise and our thanks,
be pleasant to you this day, Holy One,
our rock and redeemer.

Proclamation and Response

Prayer of Confession (1 Corinthians 12)

Rock and redeemer, you call us to remember
that we are all members of one body in your Spirit.

**Forgive us when we do not embody your love,
when we speak harshly to one another,
and when we judge others in our hearts.**

Together, we drink of the one Spirit,
and share in the same love that makes us one.

**Reclaim us when we refuse to hear your word
when spoken by those who do not look or sound
as we expect.**

Remind us that when one of your creatures suffers,
all of creation suffers.

**Renew us when we forget that we are one body,
one family of our heavenly creator.**

Words of Assurance (1 Corinthians 12)

Hear the good news:

God heals our illusion of separateness
and makes us one and whole.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

**In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.
Glory to God. Amen.**

Passing the Peace of Christ (Luke 4)

Holy bringer of peace, help us embody your word to
one another, as we offer signs of peace.

The peace of Christ be with you.

The peace of Christ be with you always.

Prayer of Preparation (Nehemiah 8)

Holy Maker, Holy Breath, Holy Teacher,
as we prepare to hear your word,

help us receive the good news of your love.
with joy and delight.

Give us ears to hear it with the passion
of the captives who returned from exile
in the time of Nehemiah. Amen.

*Response to the Word (Nehemiah 8, 1 Corinthians 12,
Luke 4)*

Holy Keeper of Promises,
we hear your word in ancient stories;
we feel your Spirit moving in our midst today.
And we see you now in the members of your holy body
who give thanks for the good news
of your everlasting love. Amen.

Thanksgiving and Communion

Offering Prayer (1 Corinthians 12)

Holy Word, Holy Breath, Holy Maker of all,
with gratitude for making us one body,
we share our gifts with one another
and with the world. Amen.

Great Thanksgiving

Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to God.

Let us give our thanks to the Holy One.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is a right, good, and a joyful thing,
always and everywhere
to give our thanks to you,
who used Ezra and Nehemiah
to bring your holy word to the captives
who returned from Babylon to Jerusalem.

You have promised that all who are captive
shall be made free,
that all who are broken will be made whole.

The heavens tell your glory in soundless song,
sending your message of wonder and love
to all people in every time and place.
And so, with your creatures on earth
and all the heavenly chorus,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:
**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one
who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy are you, and holy is your child, Jesus,
who you sent to bring good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim the year of the your favor.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us,
Jesus took bread, gave thanks to you,
broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples, saying,
“Take, eat; this is my body that is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.”

When the supper was over, he took the cup,
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, saying,
“Drink from this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me.”

And so, in remembrance of your mighty acts
in Jesus Christ, we proclaim the mystery of faith.
Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.
Pour out your Holy Spirit on us,
and on these gifts of grain and grape,
fruit of the earth and work of human hands.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be the body of Christ to a world
that awaits release from captivity.
Creator of all, light of the world, Spirit of truth,
you are the one God to whom we offer our
praise and thanks.
Amen.

Sending Forth

Benediction (1 Corinthians 12)

As living members of the holy body of Christ,
may we see the face of the Holy One
in everyone we meet.
And may we hear God's holy word
in every sound and voice we hear.
Go in peace to love and serve the world.
Amen.

January 30, 2022

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

B. J. Beu

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Color

Green

Scripture Readings

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13;
Luke 4:21-30

Theme Ideas

God knows us before we were even born. The psalmist proclaims that the God who took us from our mother's womb is our rock and our refuge. God promises Jeremiah that he will be told what to say and how to speak—for God puts words of prophecy in the mouths of God's servants. Jesus knew only too well the effect those words can have on communities, as his hometown almost threw him off a cliff when they heard him speak. And Paul warns that while God knows us and gives us words to speak, we see only in part. What we share with the world is only part of a much larger truth—a truth that we will never fully understand until we see God face-to-face. It is more important to love well than to

speak with the tongues of angels or to unfold all mysteries. This is sobering advice to those who eagerly proclaim the word of God while hiding the love of God.

Invitation and Gathering

Centering Words (Jeremiah 1, Psalm 71, 1 Corinthians 13)

God has known us, loved us, and been with us since before we were knit together in our mothers' wombs. Sink into the arms of Love this day, and trust the hand that holds you, for we have abided in this love long before we first drew breath.

Call to Worship (Psalm 71)

Offer God your worship and your praise.

**Before God formed us in our mothers' wombs,
God knew and loved us.**

Offer Christ your love and your devotion.

**Before we drew our first breath,
Christ consecrated us as his own.**

Offer the Spirit your gratitude and your thanksgiving.

**Before we heard the call to heal the world,
the Spirit sustained our every heartbeat.**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

We will offer God our worship and our praise.

Opening Prayer (Jeremiah 1, 1 Corinthians 13)

Wrap us in the arms of your love, Holy One,
for we need to feel your healing touch.

As we gather to worship you this day,
humble our hearts, teach us patience,
and touch us with kindness.

Open our eyes,
that we may see ourselves as you see us.
Open our hearts to your Spirit of gentleness,
that our words may be true
and our love may be pure.
Bind us in a love that does not fail or fade,
that we may bear all things, believe all things,
and hopes all things in your love,
which never ends. Amen.

Proclamation and Response

Prayer of Yearning (Jeremiah 1, 1 Corinthians 13)

Source of truth and love,
we yearn for certainty in an uncertain world.
Grant us the courage to proclaim the words
you place in our mouths.
Remind us that your love alone
softens the heart and mind,
allowing us to receive your mysterious ways.
When we fear that others will not see things our way,
remind us that we all see in a mirror dimly.
Silence the clanging cymbals that distract us,
and harken us to your voice once more,
that we may abide in your love. Amen.

Words of Assurance (Jeremiah 1, Psalm 71, 1 Corinthians 13)

The one who formed us in our mothers' wombs
continues to shape our lives today.
Rejoice in the good news:
God knows us and loves us as we are.

God's love heals our wounds,
and gives us hope for the time before us.

Passing the Peace of Christ (1 Corinthians 13)

We know that faith, hope, and love abide. Let us share this wondrous gift, as we pass the peace of Christ this day.

Introduction to the Word (1 Corinthians 13)

With faith leading the way, with hope lighting our path,
and with love guiding us home;
let us open our hearts to hear the word of God.

Response to the Word (1 Corinthians 13)

Love is patient.

Love is kind.

Love is not envious.

It is not boastful.

Love is not arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way.

Love does not rejoice in the wrong,
but rejoices in the right.

Love bears all things.

Believes all things.

Hopes all things.

Endures all things.

Love never ends.

God blesses us with this love,
today and all days.

Amen.

Thanksgiving and Communion

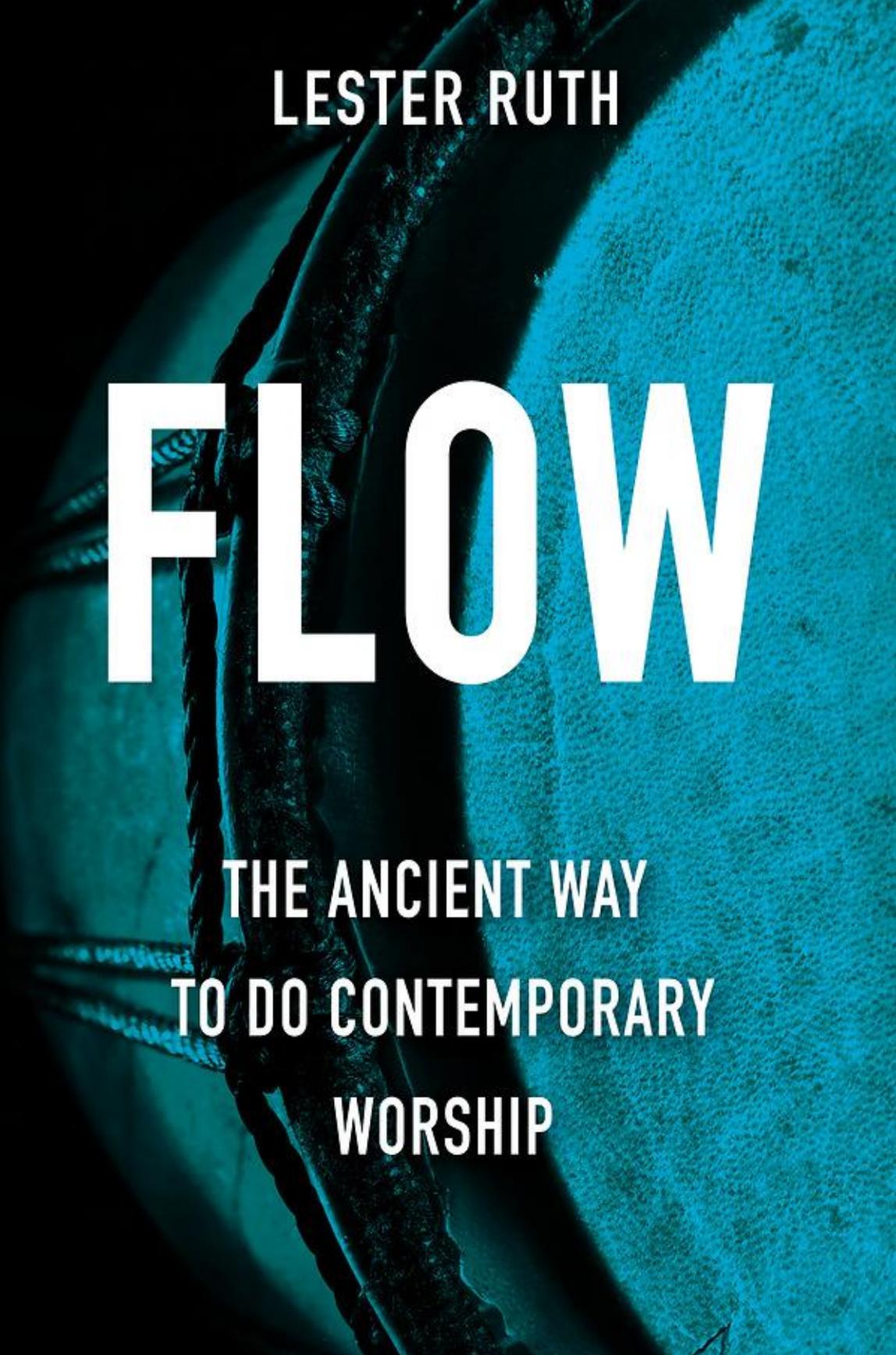
Offering Prayer (Jeremiah 1, Psalm 71, 1 Corinthians 13)

Source of every blessing,
 you are our refuge and our strength.
Even before we were born,
 you knew us completely.
You have watched over us
 all the days of our lives.
Receive these offerings
 and the gratitude of thankful hearts.
Grow the ministries of your church,
 that we may bring your message of love
 to a world deafened by clanging cymbals
 and noisy gongs. Amen.

Sending Forth

Benediction (Jeremiah 1, 1 Corinthians 13)

God sends us forth with words of love on our lips.
 Christ sends us with acts of love in our deeds.
The Spirit sends us with the power of love
to sustain our lives.
 **We go in the power of God's love
 to be ambassadors of Christ's love and peace.**



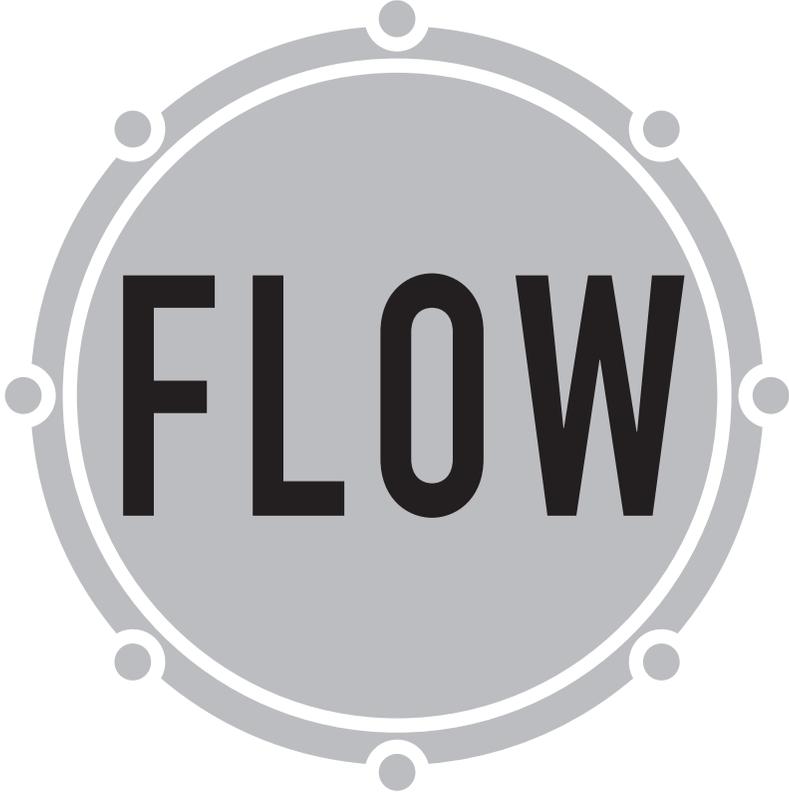
LESTER RUTH

FLOW

**THE ANCIENT WAY
TO DO CONTEMPORARY
WORSHIP**

LESTER RUTH

Editor



**THE ANCIENT WAY
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 **Abingdon Press™**

Nashville

FLOW:
THE ANCIENT WAY TO DO CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP

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Chapter 1

AN ANCIENT WAY TO DO CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP

Lester Ruth

Allow me a bold statement: there are qualities in the description of ancient Christian worship that we today should more normally associate with the style of contemporary worship than with traditional worship. This assertion might surprise you as you conjure up an image of a typical contemporary service today and what you imagine ancient worship was like. Yes, of course, there were no bands with guitars and drum kits in the second century. Nor did churches at that time have the electronic technology we now use in worship. But there are certain points of connection—critical similar aspects—between ancient ways of worship and the style of contemporary worship.

My statement above is bold because recent attempts to reappropriate ancient ways of worship—attempts reflected in recent liturgical resources of mainline denominations—normally trigger associations with style elements of so-called traditional worship. Turn to one of these official denominational liturgical resources and you will see the flagship for the reappropriating of ancient Christian worship, namely, an order of worship called Word and Table or something similar. The manner of presentation of this order (sometimes called a four-fold order because it has four main parts: gathering, then time spent on the word of God [the Bible], followed by the Lord's Supper, and culminating in a sending back into the world) suggests a traditional style of worship. The manner in which the order is laid out on a page, the instructions for how to lead this order (i.e., the rubrics), and the surrounding resources all steer an adopter of this order toward a traditional style of worship.

But what if that need not be the case? What if there were a way to do this ancient order of Word and Table in a way that felt thoroughly and authentically contemporary?

There is such a way. Amazingly, the seeds for doing the ancient order of Word and Table in a contemporary way can be found in one of the earliest historical descriptions of this order, a well-known passage that influenced all the modern, mainline liturgical resources.

Justin Martyr's Ancient/Contemporary Order of Worship

The well-known passage describing this order of worship was in a work by a second-century martyr for the faith, Justin. This man, writing about the church's worship as part of a larger defense of the Christian faith, described what took place when Christians gathered to worship. The passage has had enormous influence on recent liturgical revisions. Probably every worship scholar and denominational worship official knows this passage by heart. Here is how Justin Martyr described worship on the first day of the week:

On the day called Sunday, there is an assembling of those who live in cities or the countryside, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. Then, when the reader has stopped, the presider in an address admonishes and invites us to the imitation of these good things. Then we all stand up together and send prayers to God. And, as we said before, when we have stopped praying, bread and wine and water are brought, and the presider sends up prayers and thanksgivings in similar fashion, to the best of his ability, and the people give their assent, saying "Amen." And there is a distribution and a partaking by each person of the food over which thanks have been given. And the food is sent to those who are not present by means of the deacons.¹

Justin concludes his description noting how worshippers could contribute money so the church could take care of those in need. Although Justin does not mention a dismissal of the people or a return of the people to their homes, surely his worship services eventually ended and people returned home.

1. The translation of Justin here is based on the Greek and English found in Denis Minns and Paul Parvis, eds., *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 258–61, and Cyril C. Richardson, ed. *Early Christian Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 287.

Worshippers in mainline denominations with newly revised books of worship will probably recognize the basic order of the worship Justin described because it parallels the order they will see in their own books. Indeed, Justin's description is one of the important historical sources used to shape these new orders of worship since it is one of the first descriptions of a whole service from the early church.² These new orders based on Justin's description typically have four sections that correspond to the basic sequence seen in Justin. The "entrance" of the four-fold Word and Table order corresponds to where Justin speaks of the assembling of the congregation. The "proclamation" or "Word" in recently printed versions of Word and Table corresponds to the multiple readings from scripture described by Justin (the "memoirs of the apostles" or the "writings of the prophets"). Next in the four-fold order come the main congregational prayers, especially intercession, as well as consecration of the Lord's Supper, which is just how Justin describes what comes after the sermon. After Communion comes the "sending" in the four-fold order. Even though Justin did not mention such a sending, there surely was a departure of the people. Recent published denominational resources fill out these four folds of "Word and Table" (Entrance, Word, Table, Sending) by listing and providing individual acts of worship fitting for each of the four sections.

Given the parallels between Justin's order of worship from the second century and its recent appropriations, it is easy to think Justin Martyr's church in the second century worshipped in the same traditional style as many churches that have implemented this ancient order of worship. But that would be a wrong assumption.

We should notice three things in Justin's description that distinguish his ancient worship from the traditional way many modern churches do a four-fold Word and Table order. In fact, these three elements have more in common with a contemporary style of worship than with so-called traditional worship and are the key to pursuing an ancient way to contemporary worship. What are these three elements?

2. For many denominations, like my own Methodist Church, this order was something new in its history, particularly as the norm for weekly worship. Prior to the Word and Table orders of recent denominational resources, most Methodist worship, Sunday in and Sunday out, was a standard "traditional worship" order consisting of some mixture of responsive readings, congregational hymns, unison prayers, choir anthem, and pastoral prayer, all leading up to the main scripture reading with sermon toward the end of the service. Some sort of invitation or call to discipleship, with a final hymn, concluded the service. This was the order of worship I grew up with as a small child until the four-fold Word and Table was introduced in the 1980s.

The first is an open-endedness of time. Justin spoke about reading from the Old and the New Testaments for “as long as time permits.” The Old Testament readings he called “the writings of the prophets” and the New Testament readings “the memoirs of the apostles.” We might be mesmerized by that balance and breadth: his church read from both the Old and New Testaments. But notice something more subtle: the readings went on “as long as time permits.” This phrase suggests the readings were not entirely prescribed with a clear beginning and ending for each Sunday. More importantly, it meant someone was having to determine the beginning and ending of the readings; that is, someone was having to discern matters of time. How would one have known if a reading had gone on long enough? Of course, there would have been natural ending points in passages, but surely there was something more, a discerning of what seems fitting, right, and long enough for that particular occasion and people. In contrast, if we do an ancient order of Word and Table with a fully written-out order of worship in a bulletin or from a book, what discernment of time is needed as we progress steadily through the printed order?

The second is the need for extemporaneity in praying. Describing how the presider prays at the Lord’s Supper, Justin did not say he used a prescribed, written-out Communion prayer. Instead, Justin pointed out how the presider prayed “according to his ability,” that is, extemporaneously. With no fixed Communion consecration prayer (and, presumably, with extemporaneous prayer throughout the service), there was a fluidity, flexibility, and opportunity for variety in the content of worship. And, as anyone who has ever prayed extemporaneously will tell you, there was also that same need for the discernment of time and occasion to sense when it is time to move through the sections of a prayer and when it is time to bring it to a close. Something beyond the literacy required to read a prayer is needed to lead worship in this sort of way. In contrast, if our service of Word and Table is fully scripted with every word chosen ahead of time, the requirement for leading involves proper handling of a written text, not the shaping of prayer from the heart.

Finally, Justin laid out his order of worship by actions. In other words, Justin’s description envisions an order of worship as a series of essential activities that flow from one to the next. Notice all the verbs (that is, actions) he uses to describe the order: assembling...read...admonishes and invites...stand...offer...send...brought...give assent...send up...distribute and partaking. Justin put the emphasis in his description of Christian worship in these activities. Of course, Justin did mention a few things—objects like memoirs and prayers—in the order of worship, but if you go beyond

the surface of his words, you will see essential activities immediately below the surface. In contrast, how often have you seen people treat the printed order of worship as a list of objects that can be checked off like groceries on a shopping list? (I have seen that done in church: someone holding their bulletin and putting a check mark every time something has been completed.)

These three elements (open-ended time, extemporaneity, and an understanding of worship as a flow of actions) provide the common ground between Justin's form of ancient worship and our contemporary worship. In other words, Justin's service had a certain feel and rhythm that required those leading worship to actively discern fittingness, appropriateness, and a host of other subtle qualities in real time. The way Justin described it, the worship in his church did not move according to a completely predetermined script. As the service began, the worship leader did not simply hit the "start" button and the service unfolded precisely according to a plan.

Leading Word and Table as Justin portrayed it required sensibilities similar to musicians who create a groove in a song. To make music with a groove is not simply a matter of replicating the notes and rhythm as found on a page. What good musicians do is a subtle skill by which they make the music come alive, be distinctive, and be emotionally compelling. Gifted musicians give music a groove, a term resisting easy definition. With my limited piano skills, I can play the notes written on a page of music. More accomplished musicians can do much more. I can play a song; they can make music with a groove.

These qualities (open-ended time, extemporaneity, and an understanding of worship as a flow of actions) have been common in contemporary worship. I am suggesting that by using these key qualities found in Justin Martyr's description of ancient worship, we can find a new way to do older ways of Protestant worship, whether "traditional worship" or "ancient worship."

From Ancient to Traditional Worship: The Path after Justin

But what happened after Justin Martyr? How did worship lose those three qualities seen in his writing?

After the second century, some things remained the same. What did not change was the shape of the basic order of worship: an initial gathering led to a time of scripture reading, followed by a series of Table-related acts of worship, culminating in the Eucharist. A dismissal ended the service. This basic order would define worship up until the Protestant Reformation of the

sixteenth century. This basic order lies behind recent revisions of the worship resources of many denominations. The order did not change.

What did change were those three elements highlighted in Justin's description: open-ended time, extemporaneity, and an understanding of worship as a flow of actions. Starting in the fourth century especially, the manner in which a Word and Table order was done began to change. The direction of change over the centuries generally has been away from those three elements. This trajectory has meant that, although we recently have used Justin's description of worship to understand what we are doing in the new liturgical resources and to validate them, we have subtly interpreted his order of worship with presumptions drawn from the last 1,500 years of worship history. We have given it a different feel and a different rhythm, thus losing the groove that it originally had.

How and when did those changes happen? Simply put, in the centuries after Justin Martyr (remember that he was in the second century), ways of worship have tended to move from open-endedness of time to bounded time, from extemporaneity to a fully scripted liturgical text, and from the order of worship understood as a sequence of activity to a succession of liturgical objects. Of course, these changes were neither sudden nor simultaneously in every place. Neither were they completely thorough in how any church at any one time worshipped, particularly in the first centuries after Justin Martyr. Nonetheless, the overall trajectories of worship history have been away from the qualities Justin highlighted, except in the case of some liturgical traditions of recent centuries.

As the church moved from its earliest centuries into the Middle Ages (the sixth century and after), several developments launched the trajectory away from the three elements critical for the four-fold Word and Table service described by Justin. These developments would erode the need for active discernment of time and the capability for extemporaneity. The developments would also help Christians see their order of worship as consisting of a list of objects to be done, not a sequence of unified actions.

The movement of the trajectory was slow, unfolding over centuries, but it was steady. For example, bit by bit, there was a loss of extemporaneous prayer as worship history moved from the late patristic period into the medieval. Prayers and other liturgical texts became written down, edited, combined, scrutinized, shared, and standardized as families of liturgical rites associated with large regions developed. Eventually, the entire service would be scripted. These changes resulted in a tighter management of time and a much decreased need for inward discernment as to the immediate fittingness for a

time and place. Leading worship by a liturgical text gives a worship leader a different relationship to the temporal rhythm of the entire service.

Similarly, the development of lectionaries organizing scripture readings for each service (in conjunction with the development of an ever more complicated liturgical year) changed worship's relationship to time and active discernment. As the beginning and ending point of each reading was set—as well as the specific passage to be read—readers and preachers became less individually responsible for determining the length of the reading and its appropriateness for a congregation in a particular time and place. And, depending upon the particular lectionaries being used, the readings could have varying degrees of natural relatedness to each other. In other words, the multiple readings might fit well together, or they might not.

Another major development was the introduction into written orders of worship of elements that were done in every service. The danger, if we may call it that, of such acts of worship is that it becomes easy to see them as things or objects to be checked off in the order of worship. It is easy to forget what they essentially are: a way of doing some vital worshipping activity toward God. Eventually these regular elements tended to be called by some technical name—often the first several words—that hid their essential nature as verbal activity and made it easy to think of them as liturgical things or objects. As orders became more scripted, it was those names that were mentioned and remembered in orders of worship, not some essential worshipping activity. Ancient examples would include the prayers of praise and adoration like the *Gloria in Excelsis* or the *Te Deum*. A modern example would be the Doxology listed in many modern orders of worship. Many wonderful items were added to the classic Word and Table order over the centuries, but there was a loss of the original feel of Justin's service. It became easier to think of Word and Table as a sequence of liturgical objects, not as a flow of worshipping actions.

One other historical development undercut the groove of the earliest Word and Table services: the loss of spontaneous interaction between the worship leaders and congregation. Worship through the first several centuries bore hallmarks of public ritual in an oral culture like the use of call and response and spur-of-the-moment outbursts from the congregation to which a liturgical leader responded. Anyone who has participated in worship involving interactive dimensions like these realizes that having them adds a certain feel to a service. Their loss as the first millennium of Christian history rolled over to the second was another way the order of Word and Table became a different kind of worship.

The coming of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century brought a fracturing of Word and Table as the standard order of worship, along with a sowing of a wide diversity about how to order worship among Protestants. All this was the result of an amazing anomaly that had developed by the late Middle Ages. Late medieval churches had weekly or daily worship using a Word and Table order to consecrate the Eucharist, but actual reception of Communion by the people was infrequent! Protestants uniformly decided there would be no celebration of the Lord's Supper without reception. With that conviction in hand, Protestants could either increase the frequency of reception or create new, non-Communion (that is, non-Word and Table) orders of worship highlighting the sermon. Because increasing the frequency proved very difficult to accomplish, the result was creation of a diverse arrangement of orders of worship, whether in the sixteenth century or now. New liturgical approaches might have been created with the new Protestant orders, but what was not reclaimed in the major early Protestant liturgical traditions (Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed) was the first centuries' feel for doing Word and Table.

In addition, other early Protestant developments reinforced a trajectory away from the original ancient way found in Justin's worship. Ironically, one of these was the reintroduction of congregational song (as opposed to a reliance upon choirs to provide all the music). While congregational singing was a wonderful recovery for Protestants and brought its own sense of renewal, the manner in which Protestants often did songs did not contribute to recovering the ancient feel of worship as a continuous flow of activity. The way most Protestants handled congregational song usually reinforced the notion of doing only one thing at a time—we sing a song and when the music ends we do something else—thus eliminating the layering of multiple liturgical actions simultaneously.

Most Protestants also continued to rely upon a written liturgical text, a reliance that increased as the printing press made standardized texts more easily produced and distributed. Therefore, extemporaneity and discernment of time continued to be marginal concerns, except for some Protestants. The presentation of a printed order of worship with its written-out texts likewise created an assumption about the independence of the objects, that is, acts of worship listed on the page.

The standard tone of Protestant worship in its major traditions also worked against having the feel of Justin's worship. Protestant worship, on the whole, has been characterized by being rational (concerned with the mind), verbal (reliant upon words), and instructive (cultivating the knowing of what

is being done and why). The later philosophical movement of the eighteenth century called the Enlightenment brought about an emphasis on these qualities. The social advancement of congregations and traditions did too, since increased education, greater wealth, and higher social position have often led to presumptions about what constitutes proper worship. The combined effect of these factors has often been a concern for a way of worship that does not have the same liturgical dynamics of an oral culture like the one we can presume in Justin Martyr's description. The combined effect is to produce worship like we saw in mid-twentieth century mainline Protestantism, so-called "traditional worship."

Of course, there have been some Protestant worship traditions (including Pentecostal, Charismatic, or non-denominational) that have recovered the elements seen in Justin's account: an open-endedness of time, extemporaneity, and the order as a flowing sequence of essential activity. But they rarely had these elements when they were worshipping by an order that included the Table. These traditions usually have not been interested in worship history other than what they draw from the New Testament.

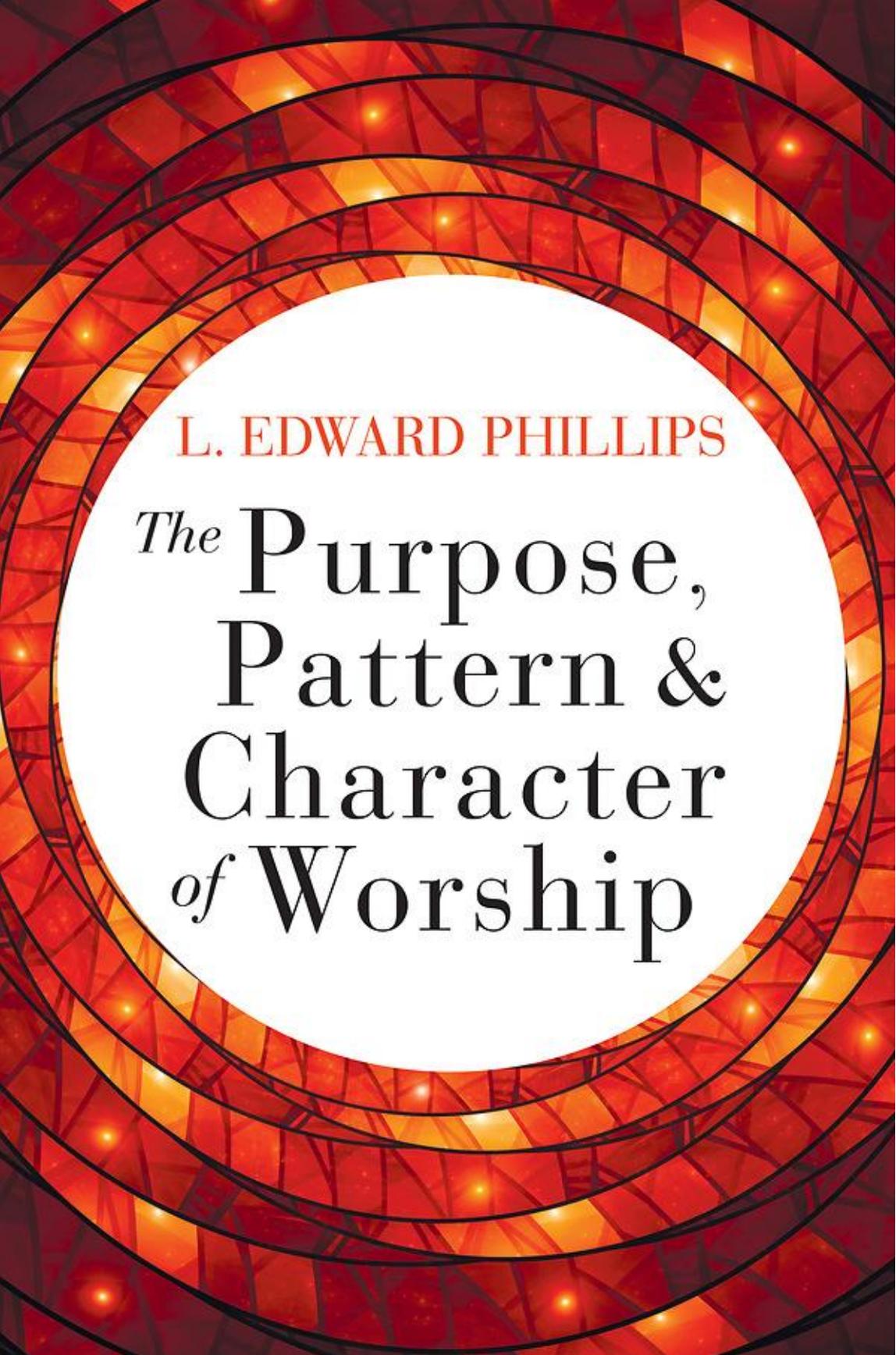
Very recent developments, including technological developments, have often reinforced the loss of an ancient groove for mainline Protestant worship. The growing ability for local congregations to print its own order of worship and texts—first through mimeograph machines, then copiers, and now computer printers—can now easily place an order of worship adapted for each service into the hands of all worshippers. Holding such an order draws the eyes downward and makes a worshipper's body more passive. The manner of presentation on the page tends to reinforce the isolation of individual acts of worship as independent objects, while also instilling a sense of orderly, sequential progression through the service, one item at a time.

The recent shift of worship leadership to laity seated in the pews has brought about another development: gaps of time waiting for the next act of worship. When these lay "liturgists" are seated throughout the space, there is inevitably a gap of time until they walk to the spot (usually marked by another technological development, a microphone) to do their part. The stationary microphone identifies the place where leadership can take place, thus isolating the location for leading and also further isolating the items listed in the order of worship as separate acts of worship.

And that is where mainline, "traditional" Protestant worship was by the mid-twentieth century. It had lost the groove it had in the second century and had a different feel to it. It had lost its original open-endedness in time, its extemporaneity, and its order as a smooth flow moving from one action to the

next. Unfortunately, when denominations over recent decades introduced the four-fold order of Word and Table as a recovery of an ancient way of worship, its advocates did not pick up on these subtle aspects of Justin’s description. Instead, advocates of the new “ancient worship” picked up the feel of the immediately preceding “traditional” Protestant worship. Thus it was easy to confuse “traditional Protestant worship” and this attempt to recover “ancient worship” because outwardly they looked and felt so similar.

But who says a Word and Table order today cannot be done with the same groove seen in the second century? Who says Word and Table cannot provide a template for doing contemporary worship? Answering those questions is the goal of the remainder of this book.



L. EDWARD PHILLIPS

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of Worship

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 Abingdon Press[®]
Nashville

THE PURPOSE, PATTERN, AND CHARACTER OF WORSHIP

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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CHAPTER ONE
Worship Today

What's Going on Here?

"If you mean Darcy," cried her brother, "he may go to bed, if he chooses, before it begins—but as for the ball, it is quite a settled thing. . . ."

"I should like balls infinitely better," she replied, "if they were carried on in a different manner; but there is something insufferably tedious in the usual process of such a meeting. It would surely be much more rational if conversation instead of dancing made the order of the day."

"Much more rational, my dear Caroline, I dare say, but it would not be near so much like a ball."

—Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

Casually dressed suburbanites stream into the large, darkened auditorium as a countdown flashes on the three huge projection screens over the stage. Some hold a cup of coffee in one hand and in the other a leaflet warning those who have epilepsy about the strobe effects to come during the performance. The countdown finishes as a rock band takes the stage for the opening song. Thus they begin to worship.

As Sunday school classes dismiss, country folk enter the brightly lit sanctuary, greeting people who have been attending other classes as well as those who have only just arrived. A musician begins a hymn on the piano, and the pitch of the conversations increases. From the pulpit, the lay leader calls the meeting to order: "Who had a birthday this past week?" Someone raises a hand and everyone sings "Happy Birthday." Thus they begin to worship.

In the heart of a city, urban dwellers quietly enter the nave of the church as soft light filters through the stained-glass windows. A few whispers can be heard as the organist plays the prelude, a Bach toccata and

fugue. When the organist shifts to the opening measures of a hymn, the congregation stands to sing. Garbed in their vestments, the choir processes down the central nave, followed by the processional cross, acolytes, and ministers. Thus they begin to worship.

Three different congregations, three different settings, three very different approaches to worship. How can we understand all these diverse events as “worship”? Are they essentially the same thing? Each clearly has its appeal: the excitement of the suburban church, the warmth of the rural congregation, the majesty and solemnity of the urban mass. Each has its own distinctive style, its own distinctive character. And to those of us who have visited churches in various settings, there is something recognizable about all these vignettes, something familiar. We have seen them before, or something very similar. We can discern in them patterns of sameness, though what may strike us first is their diversity.

American Christianity, of course, consists of numerous denominational and ethnic traditions, and one might expect significant differences among congregations from different traditions. Ethnicity and denomination, however, are not sufficient to account for all of the diversity in worship, for the congregations I describe above could well belong to the same denomination or ethnic group. Neither can we attribute the differences entirely to social location, though that will certainly be an important influence. These diverse expressions of worship illustrate a cultural repertoire of Christian worship in the twenty-first century that cuts across denomination and social identity.

Diversity in Worship

Diversity in worship marks the church in the twenty-first century, but it is not unique to our time. We will be examining the evolution of worship practices across the wide middle of Protestant congregations in America, but we begin with the Methodists for an example of how a tradition struggles with matters of liturgical identity and difference.

Methodists. In 1784, John Wesley sent the newly formed Methodist Episcopal Church the *Sunday Service*, an abridgment of the English *Book of Common Prayer*, containing fully realized orders for morning and evening prayer, Holy Communion, baptism, and ordinations, along with a lectionary and various pastoral rites and prayers.¹ Adherence to the *Sunday Service*, however, was spotty at best, and one year after John Wesley's death in 1791, Methodists abandoned it. The 1792 *Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* contained only brief prescriptions for the content of "Public Worship":

Quest. What directions shall be given for the establishment of uniformity in public worship amongst us, on the Lord's day?

Answ. 1. Let the morning-service consist of singing, prayer, the reading of a chapter out of the Old Testament, and another out of the New, and preaching.

2. Let the afternoon-service consist of singing, prayer, the reading of one or two chapters out of the bible, and preaching.

3. Let the evening-service consist of singing prayer, and preaching.

4. But on the days of administering the Lord's supper, the two chapters in the morning-service may be omitted.

5. Let the society be met, wherever it is practicable, on the sabbath-day.²

Urban preachers followed the directions for public worship, but many frontier preachers did not even follow these simple rules because they

1. John Wesley and Methodist Episcopal Church, *John Wesley's Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, Quarterly Review Reprint Series (Nashville, TN: Quarterly Review, 1984).

2. *Methodist Episcopal Church, The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America* (Philadelphia, PA: Printed by Parry Hall, 1824), 40–41. Cited by William Nash Wade, "A History of Public Worship in the Methodist Episcopal Church and Methodist Episcopal Church, South, from 1784 to 1905" (PhD dissertation, University of Notre Dame 1981), 122.

Chapter One

found them too confining in the missionary context of the American frontier. Frontier preachers held preaching services at any time that they could gather a group of Methodist recruits, and they often treated the Lord's Day as merely another preaching occasion, with even scripture reading optional.³ By 1824, some Methodist leaders grew concerned about the lack of uniformity in pastoral leadership of Sunday worship across the denomination. That year a committee on the appointment of pastors gave the following report to General Conference:

In regard to public worship and the administration of the ordinance, it appears there is a great want of uniformity. The reading of the Scriptures, the Lord's Prayer, and the apostolic benediction are frequently omitted; and in the administration of the ordinances [i.e., the sacraments] some use the form in the Discipline, some mutilate it, and others wholly neglect it.⁴

From this description of what is "omitted," we can surmise that the services of these circuit riders may have consisted simply of singing, extemporaneous prayer, and preaching, with preaching taking up the majority of time. This was a pattern of worship born out of the contingencies of frontier evangelism and replicated as seasoned itinerants passed on their practical wisdom to neophyte preachers settling on the frontier. It contained hardly a trace of John Wesley's *Sunday Service*, especially for those preachers who "wholly neglected" the disciplinary form for administering the sacraments.

The issue of "uniformity" was not resolved in 1824, though as the American populations settled into towns over the course of the nineteenth century, Methodists gradually turned away from frontier austerity. Larger congregations in county seat towns began to reintroduce liturgical practices that previous generation of Methodists had abandoned, and this created a different problem in regard to uniformity. At the 1888 General

3. Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9–10.

4. *Journal of General Conference* (1824): 298–99. For a discussion of this, see Wade, "History of Public Worship," 218–22.

Conference of The Methodist Episcopal Church, the bishop offering the Episcopal Address complained on behalf of his fellow bishops:

In “traveling through the Connection at large” we often experience embarrassment upon discovering that we do not know how to conduct public worship in the congregation. We either sit as spectators, joining in the worship as best we can, or keep before us a written programme, and proceed with grave apprehension lest a blinder be perpetrated. The remedy is a form of public worship which shall be uniform and imperative in its essential features.⁵

We may not have much pity for the bishop, for I suspect that few pastors and worship leaders (now or then) would want to organize their regular weekly worship services for the benefit of bishops’ occasional participation. He was speaking for the episcopacy; we might question whether the rank-and-file circuit rider had any concern for the “great want of uniformity” either in 1824 or in 1888. Indeed, when denominational leaders complain about some “abuse” of the practice of worship in an official statement, especially if they forbid a particular practice, this is good evidence that the practice is fairly widespread. Likewise, when denominational leaders strongly encourage a practice, this is good evidence that it is not being done often enough to suit them. Otherwise, why would the leaders feel the need to make such comments?

Note an important difference, however, between the 1824 and 1888 General Conferences. In 1824, the reported concern was for what was being *left out* of public worship: ample reading of scripture from the Old and New Testaments, the Lord’s Prayer, and the apostolic benediction. Even the most austere Methodist services, the leaders declared, ought to contain these hallmarks of Christian worship. Sixty years later in 1888, on the other hand, the bishops complained that Methodists were beginning to include *too much*. The 1888 Episcopal Address cited above continues, “Cultivated music and responsive readings are not objectionable;

5. Methodist Episcopal Church, General Conference, *Journal of the General Conference of The Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, NY: The Church, 1888): 56–57. See Wade, “History of Public Worship,” 330–42.

but when they consume time needed for general hymns, prayer, and sermon, they become monotonous.”⁶ By the latter decades of the nineteenth century, as Methodists became established in towns in what was no longer the frontier, the more conservative bishops grew concerned that Methodist worship was becoming so “cultivated” that it had lost its focus on the more humble core practices of singing, preaching, and praying.

Whether the concern was too little tradition or too many liturgical practices, nineteenth-century Methodists clearly exhibited a diversity in worship. The official denominational guidelines made up only a part of the content of worship in Methodist congregations. With so much diversity of practice, it may look as if order and style in Methodist worship were arbitrary, with congregations or pastors doing their own thing without historic norms or patterns.

This conclusion is wrong.

Patterned Diversity: The Character of Worship

As this historical case study demonstrates, Methodists do not have a *single* identifiable form of worship. However, this is not because they lack patterns. As we expand our study to Presbyterians, Baptists, and Congregationalists, we will find that these American denominations, like the Methodists, have *several* identifiable, historical patterns of worship, though most pastors and congregations are not conscious of them as patterns. They are present simply as implicit expectations held by worship leaders and congregations whenever they plan and participate in worship. Congregations have patterns—they just don’t realize they do.

This book brings to conscious awareness the implicit patterns in the worship of Protestant congregations in the United States. The metaphor I employ to talk about these patterns is *character*. As for people, so for worship, character indicates distinctive traits, style, and manners of being in the world.

6. *Journal of General Conference* (1888): 57.

Within the distinctive individuality of each person, moreover, we can recognize “character types.” We may refer to “the character of a father” or “the character of a mother” and know implicitly what that means. We speak of “the character of a leader” or “the character of a soldier.” Though every single leader or soldier, father or mother fulfills the role uniquely, we can discern a pattern that draws its shape from the purpose that a leader, soldier, father, or mother must fulfill. In the same way, worship has character because worship has distinctive traits, styles, and patterns. It can have strong character, which lends to participants a sense of its power. Or worship can have a weak character that leads participants to experience it as trivial.

Over my years of teaching, I have read evaluations of worship services in numerous congregations. In all that time, no one has ever complained about an experience of worship being *too* purposeful. I have, on the other hand, received many complaints about worship that felt irrelevant or incoherent. Obviously, no one ever *intends* a worship service to be irrelevant or incoherent. Most of us long for worship that is purposeful and engaging; we desire worship that has strong character. I am counting on this longing for strong character in worship among the readers of my book. While a good bit of what follows will illustrate worship as it takes place in congregations, I am not merely interested in providing descriptions of the character of worship practices and patterns, for description is not enough. Worship can (and almost always does) have character flaws, places where it lacks integrity, where its practices do not match its goals. Wise and faithful worship planners will want to tend to these flaws of character, and this will require more than description; it will require evaluation. Furthermore, if Christian worship is always supremely significant, as I will argue, then worship leaders, planners, and congregations will need to seek more than coherence between practices and goals. Not all goals are of equal value, and this will require another level of evaluation. Strong, coherent character is not enough; we must also strive for *good* character.

In this study, I lay out a set of methodological principles to assist pastors and worship teams in their planning of congregational worship. I

hope these principles will equip pastors and leaders with critical tools to help evaluate worship in their congregations so that it can have integrity of character and be more coherent, more compelling, but above all more faithful to the gospel.

Principles for Understanding the Character of Worship

1. All worship follows patterns.

Without identifiable patterns, we would not be able to recognize our actions as worship rather than, say, a business meeting or bridge club. While it is logically possible to conceive of a worship service that does not follow any established pattern, in actual practice congregations do not gather for worship and then begin to figure out what to do, nor do worship planners start with a blank slate. Regular services of worship could not continue for long without some sort of structure that the congregation recognizes, such as the use of the Bible or the time and place for the gathering. Even the classic Quaker meeting, with its “un-programmed” procedures for waiting on the movement of the Holy Spirit, is a highly structured pattern of gathering in silence at a specific time with certain rules for conduct of the meeting.

Years ago, I conducted an unscientific experiment in a campus ministry setting that illustrates this principle. Worship at this campus ministry took place in a multipurpose room with a movable lectern, communion table, and folding chairs set up in semicircular rows. One Sunday morning when I was responsible for leading the worship, I intentionally placed all of the chairs and furniture randomly around the perimeter of the room. As the congregation began to arrive, I informed them I was not going to impose a seating arrangement. Instead, I wanted them to exercise the freedom to sit wherever they wished and to arrange the furniture however they felt led. Gradually, this congregation of students began to move the chairs and furniture into an arrangement for worship that turned out to

be a rather sloppy version of our usual arrangement of chairs, with almost exactly the same orientation of the table, lectern, and seating. Without intending to do so (even being discouraged from doing so!), we had conformed to our established pattern of seating.

2. The patterns of worship work on two levels: the liturgical unit and the macro-pattern.

The macro-pattern is made up of several liturgical units, usually placed in a standardized order. Liturgical units are blocks of liturgical action that have a particular shape and content.⁷ For instance, most congregations have a liturgical unit of reading scripture followed by a sermon:

Scripture Reading(s)
Sermon/Message

Such a concise statement of this simple pattern will be so obvious that it may seem banal. This simple pattern, however, is remarkably durable and flexible, and it expands in a rich variety of ways. In any given congregation, there may be one or several readings of scripture. Usually there will only be one sermon, though in some congregations, perhaps more than one speaker will address the congregation, as occurred recently in my home congregation when the pastor preached a sermon and a layperson gave a “personal testimony.”

Typically, this liturgical unit will include several pieces of liturgical action that separate the readings from the sermon. Here is one possible arrangement:

Old Testament Reading
Psalm
Epistle Reading

7. I am adapting the concept “liturgical unit” from the Comparative Liturgy school of liturgics. For a good introduction to the comparative method and analysis of liturgical units, see Robert Taft, S.J., “The Structural Analysis of Liturgical Units: An Essay in Methodology,” in *Beyond East & West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1984), 151–64.

Chapter One

Children's Message

Gospel Acclamation/chorus/hymn

Gospel Reading

Hymn

Sermon

Or in a more "contemporary" vein:

Scripture

Skit illustrating the reading

Message

There are congregations that occasionally do not have a sermon. Yet, if there is no sermon, something almost always takes its place, such as a play, a set of musical pieces (e.g., a Christmas or Easter cantata), or extended silence. In other words, the basic pattern remains. Rarely will we find a worship service in which there are no readings or in which the reading of scripture follows preaching, though we do find examples where the reading of scripture is interspersed throughout the sermon.

As we go on, I will say much more about how liturgical units function, but for now it is important to recognize that liturgical units are components of macro-patterns. The macro-pattern includes the overall structure of a service of worship: how the order begins, how it organizes liturgical units, how it concludes. As stated above, *the macro-pattern is made up of discrete liturgical units, usually placed in a recognizable order*. The two most widely used descriptions of macro-patterns today are "traditional worship" and "contemporary worship." While I will show how these two descriptions are inadequate, they do helpfully convey some important differences among macro-patterns. In the examples above of the scripture-preaching liturgical unit, one could easily identify which would be more at home in a traditional service (Gospel Acclamation/Gospel Reading/Hymn/Sermon) and which would fit a contemporary service (Skit illustrating the reading/Song/Message).

My illustrations, thus far, have been examples of words and actions arranged in a particular sequential order. While sequential order is a feature of the macro-pattern, it is only one feature among many. In fact, for some macro-patterns the actual sequential order of liturgical units is less significant than other factors. These other factors include environment and aesthetics (art, music, architecture), as well as emotions that characterize participation in the service.

Since congregational worship is not an occasional but a regularly repeated practice, once a particular macro-pattern is established it tends to continue without a great deal of change. As a pattern, it functions as a sort of “default mode” that does not require the conscious awareness of those who lead or participate in the worship service.⁸ Macro-patterns do evolve, but they tend to do so slowly, unless a strong personality commandeers the worship life of the congregation. More than a few eager worship leaders have learned from a failed attempt at liturgical reform that it is less disruptive to add something (a liturgical unit) to a congregation’s order of worship than it is to subtract something or change the macro-pattern fundamentally.

3. A macro-pattern of worship has a telos (goal) it aims to achieve.

Historically, patterns of worship arise to address particular concerns about church life, something the church lacks or is doing poorly. At the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, Christians in Europe addressed the problems of the church not only by reforming church teaching but first of all by addressing various concerns about worship: preaching, sacraments, use of vernacular language, and so forth. The reformers developed new patterns of worship that embodied these concerns. Not all shifts

8. I have in mind here sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*. He defines habitus as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operation necessary in order to attain them.” A significant point in this difficult definition is that a habitus does not require conscious awareness of individuals for it to do what it does. See *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

in patterns of worship are as cataclysmic as those that occurred in the sixteenth century, but the principle still applies. The meteoric rise of the Seeker church with its rejection of traditional forms of worship is a good example of this principle. The *telos* of the Seeker church is to reach out to the “unchurched.” The problem the Seeker church addresses is that the unchurched are not attracted to “traditional” churches.

Worship, of course, always has the primary goal of serving God. As the Catholic Church’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* declares, worship aims for “the sanctification of humanity in Christ and the glorification of God.”⁹ I take this to be utterly uncontroversial. But worship also serves a variety of other important, if secondary, purposes: reaching the unchurched, the need for human community, formation of group identity, help facing the struggles of life, and education in Christian virtue, to name a few.¹⁰ Each of the various patterns of worship I will describe has a distinctive *telos* that motivates its particular approach to serving God and sanctifying humanity.

4. A macro-pattern has a particular ethos, a “character,” or in some cases we might say “style,” that fits with its particular telos.

In addition to addressing a particular problem in the church, the distinctive *telos* of a pattern of worship will be connected to a congregation’s predominant concept of God, and a congregation will expect the conduct of worship that fits this concept. In his study *Congregations in America*, sociologist Mark Chaves cites a study by Lynn Smith Lovin and William Douglass to make this point:

9. *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* 10 (1963), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html, accessed July 5, 2011.

10. As liturgical scholar Lester Ruth has shown, all orders of worship intend to mediate the presence of God, but some congregations will emphasize the transcendence of God expressed through a “cosmic story,” while other congregations will emphasize God’s immanence through the telling of “personal stories.” Ruth goes on to show how the worship in various congregations also mediates the presence of God primarily through music, through reading and preaching the Word, or through the Lord’s Supper. See “A Rose by Any Other Name,” in *The Conviction of Things Not Seen: Worship and Ministry in the 21st Century*, ed. Todd E. Johnson (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2002), 47ff.

[Lovin and Douglass] accurately predict the ritual content of worship in two congregations solely from information about how congregants view themselves and God. In a congregation in which individuals consider God to be more supremely good, active, and powerful, worship was predicted to be informal and personal, with congregants “applauding” and “amusing” God while God attempts to “satisfy” congregants. In a congregation of individuals who view God in a less active and powerful way, congregants are predicted to “speak to” and “admire” God rather than “applaud” or “amuse” the deity, and the deity is expected to “counsel” and “reassure” rather than “satisfy” or “like” the congregants. The remarkable thing about these predictions is that *they are made by a computer algorithm* solely on the basis of a social-psychological theory holding that individuals’ ideas about themselves and others shape interpersonal interactions because people act to keep those ideas intact.¹¹

In other words, if a congregation primarily understands God as the creator and ruler of the universe, they will probably desire worship to conform to that understanding by employing more elevated language and actions. If a congregation thinks of God primarily as a close friend, they will expect more personal, colloquial language and actions. This is what I mean by the particular *ethos* or character of worship. We might also think of this as “style,” though that word may sound a little trivial. There is nothing trivial about the *ethos* of worship, since it directly connects to a congregation’s deep theology.

The *ethos* of worship both expresses and *shapes* the ways Christians understand God, since worship is a primary way we learn about God. It is not the only way we learn about God, however. We learn about God from all sorts of interactions in the world, including from family and friends, various social institutions, television, and the music we enjoy. If our engagement in Christian worship is limited to a couple of hours each week, it is not likely to have a very strong role in shaping our understanding of God. Nevertheless, if Chaves is right that we seek worship that confirms what we already know (or think we know) about God, this raises a host of issues for anyone who thinks, as I do, that the *telos* of Christian worship is

11. Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 140.

Chapter One

to form a congregation to be the body of Christ in the world. A great deal is at stake in the *ethos* of worship; content and style are not trivial.

Another way to understand the coherence of the *telos* and *ethos* of worship patterns is to think of them as analogous to the rules of games. It is common these days for theologians to talk about systems of religious belief as language games. Church doctrines, similar to the rules of games, are not founded on anything other than their own system of procedure. For example, there is no independent, universal reason an infield fly is an “out” in baseball. Such a rule only makes sense within the game of baseball itself. It relates to all the other rules that make baseball a game distinct from soccer. There is no infield fly rule in soccer—it would not make sense. Similarly, there is no independent, universal reason any human community would hold the Bible as scripture or preach or sing hymns or baptize or break bread in the name of Jesus *apart from* the belief system of Christianity. We learn these rules by participating in churches that practice and teach them.

We could say that the final *telos* of team sports such as baseball, basketball, and football is to outscore the other team through the fair use of athletic ability and strategy. All three of the sports I have mentioned require team cooperation and all use balls of some sort. But that would not tell us much about any particular sport, really. In baseball, winning is accomplished by scoring runs. In basketball, the players score baskets; and in football, touchdowns and field goals. Each of these sports is played on very different sorts of “fields,” and each kind of team has different numbers of players with different roles. The uniforms are quite different—caps, helmets, no cap at all, cleats or rubber-soled shoes, pads, gloves, and so on. And as I noted already, each has a distinct set of rules that only makes sense within the structure of the particular game. They share the ultimate *telos* of winning but through runs, baskets, or touchdowns and by very different styles and procedures of play. In much the same way, all the patterns of worship I describe may share the ultimate *telos* of glorifying God and sanctifying humanity, but this does not tell us much about them. Each pattern has a distinctive set of rules of procedure, and even dress and architecture, for accomplishing its particular *telos*.

The coherence of *telos* and *ethos* in worship functions not only at the macro-level; the liturgical units that make up the macro-pattern also participate in the overall *telos* and *ethos*. As an organizing system, the macro-pattern will attract units of liturgical material that fit its system—its *telos* and *ethos*. When the liturgical units fit the macro-pattern, the order of service will be (and, importantly, will “feel”) coherent. If, however, a specific liturgical unit does not work well within a macro-pattern, the liturgical unit will tend to subvert the *telos*. Unfortunately, as I will demonstrate, an incompatible liturgical unit can find its way into an order of worship. When it does, it not only subverts the *telos*, it clashes with the overall *ethos*; it will be a “character flaw.” I will say more about this in the next chapter.

In summary, here are the first four principles of method for understanding the character of worship:

1. All worship follows patterns.
2. The patterns of worship work on two levels: the liturgical unit and the macro-pattern. The macro-pattern is made up of several liturgical units, usually placed in a standardized order.
3. A macro-pattern of worship has a *telos* (goal) it aims to achieve.
4. Each macro-pattern has a particular *ethos* (character or style) that fits with its particular *telos*.

We return to our overarching metaphor: character. The distinctive character of worship for each congregation has identifiable character types, just as (to mix my metaphors) the character of baseball is different from the character of soccer. It is essential for us to understand worship character types in order to get a handle on character flaws.

To move beyond generalities, in the next chapter I will provide an overview of six character types of worship that we find in Protestant worship in the United States.

David
W. Manner



**BETTER
SUNDAYS
BEGIN
ON
MONDAY**

52 Exercises for Evaluating
Weekly Worship

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W. Manner

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 Abingdon Press[®]
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BETTER SUNDAYS BEGIN ON MONDAY:
52 EXERCISES FOR EVALUATING WEEKLY WORSHIP

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Chapter One

Creating Worship Tourists

In *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, Annie Dillard wrote, “Why do we people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? The tourists are having coffee and doughnuts on Deck C. Presumably someone is minding the ship, correcting the course, avoiding icebergs and shoals, fueling the engines, watching the radar screen and noting weather reports radioed from shore. *No one would dream of asking the tourists to do these things.*”¹

If we never involve our congregants as more than casual bystanders while we read, speak, sing, play, pray, testify, lead, mediate, commune, baptize, confess, thank, petition, and exhort, then how can we expect them to transform from passive spectators to active participators? Aren’t we really creating worship tourists who select their destination based solely on their impression of the platform tour guide and excursion offered rather than worship travelers on a continuous journey?

Tourists, on the one hand, sample other cultures as long as they aren’t too different from their own. They expect others to adjust to them. Inconvenience for a tourist is always inconvenient because it discourages pleasure and preference. Tourists only scratch the surface and ask what, when, and how much. They only go where the map takes them, are there to experience the sites, aren’t willing to stray away from their native language, and always ask, “What’s in it for me?” Worship tourists are onlookers or observers, much like they would watch an event or game. They are audience members or spectators who might be a fan or foe depending on who is playing and what is being played. And they think they are in the game because they are in the stands.

Chapter One

Travelers, on the other hand, willingly immerse themselves in cultures even when they might be radically different from their own. They adjust instead of expecting others to adjust to them. Inconvenience for a traveler is never inconvenient because it encourages discovery. Travelers always dig deep and ask who and why. They go where the road takes them, are there to understand the sites, attempt to learn new languages, and always ask, “What’s in it of me?” Travelers are involved in the game because they are contributing to it. They relate to what is going on because it is larger than them. As participants they are engaged and involved in the game because they are actually on the field and not in the stands.

Leaders facilitate participative worship not just by depending on their own strengths and abilities but also by investing in the strengths and abilities of other congregants who are willing to subordinate their individual interests to the corporate concerns of the entire congregation. The leader who promotes participative worship taps into the collective resources and talents of others by affirming their value to worship health.

Participative worship is intentionally collaborative and is not guarded, territorial, or defensive. It trusts the creative abilities and resources of the whole in the planning, preparation, and implementation. Consequently, participatory leaders are not threatened when someone else gets their way or gets the credit. Participatory worship is a culture, not a one-time event.

Will Willimon wrote, “Many of the Sunday orders of worship consist of the pastor speaking, the pastor praying, the pastor reading, and the choir singing, with little opportunity for the congregation to do anything but sit and listen. When the Sunday service is simply a time to sit quietly, hear some good music and a good sermon, sing a hymn and then go home to eat dinner, no wonder many of our people get confused into thinking that Christ only wants passive admirers rather than active followers.”²

The ultimate destination for worship tourists and travelers may be exactly the same. But the connection for the tourist is usually shallow and fleeting. The connection for the traveler, however, is always deep and continuous. The worship tourist endures the journey in order to reach the destination, while the traveler values the journey as part of the destination.

TEAM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How can we move our congregants from passive spectators to active participators?
- What are we presently doing that may be discouraging or encouraging participative worship?
- What are some of those worship leadership elements we should be asking congregants to do so our leaders aren't doing everything for them?
- How will we know if we are accomplishing our goal of more congregational worship participation?

Chapter Two

Farm Team

Congregations tend to plan and implement in the moment since Sunday comes every single week. So thinking about keeping younger players or finding future players, singers, or even a primary worship leader is rarely a consideration until a vacancy occurs.

“Player development” is what Major League Baseball calls the grooming of younger, less advanced players in their minor league system. The so-called farm teams provide mentoring, training, coaching, and practical experience for younger players with the expectation that as a player matures, he will advance to a higher level of play and responsibility. The genius of the farm system is that players get better by playing regularly in smaller venues instead of just waiting for an opening to play in the major leagues. Teams are intentionally investing in younger players for the future. A major-league team with a weak farm system may have success for a time but will rarely carry that success into the future.

The value of worship player development is realized when a congregation attempts to fill a vacancy in their worship-leading team. What most find is that the pool of potential replacements *out there* is often very shallow. Those who are available are sometimes unknown and don't always resonate with the culture of the searching congregation. Implementing a farm-team model of grooming or developing younger, less advanced players from *in here* can offer a trusted and familiar resource pool for future players, singers, or primary leaders. Investing in those who already understand the culture, personality, worship language, and mission of your church has a far greater potential for future success.

I was challenged a number of years ago while attending a worship leadership conference to make a list of individuals who had intentionally taken the

time to encourage and coach me in my early ministry years. The clinician gave us time to complete our list and then asked, "Have you told those individuals on your list how much you value that investment?" After returning home from the conference I drafted half a dozen thank-you notes to send to those mentors I had listed. Paul Williams was on that list.

Nearly four decades ago, I began my first full-time ministry position. Paul Williams served as a music and worship pastor in another church in our city. In my first week or two of ministry, he stopped by my office and didn't ask but told me he was going to pick me up the following Saturday to attend a music workshop with him. This wizened sage of music and worship ministry (he was probably forty years old) invested in a twenty-four-year-old worship-leading beginner not for what he could get from me but for what he could offer to and invest in me.

This first ministry position was one of those learning experiences that many of us have endured. Paul knew the history of our congregation and the challenges I would face way before I figured it out. He never offered useless advice or platitudes when I was struggling to stay or questioning whether I missed God's calling. He just became a friend who graciously listened, encouraged, and was available every time I needed his wisdom.

Before Paul died in 2010 from complications of Acute Myelocytic Leukemia, he had served first as music and worship pastor for thirty-five years and then, beginning in 1992, as a full-time lyricist, clinician, and composer. Even though I moved to a different state, Paul continued to coach and mentor me by sending packets of his new music every few months with a humorous personal note of encouragement and a loving note to my family. I'm sure others received similar packets and notes from Paul. My relationship with him was not unique, but he had the ability to make each person feel as if it were. I'm not certain I'd still be in ministry now if Paul Williams hadn't taken the time to help shape and develop me as a younger leader then.

Our success in worship ministry will be judged not just on how well we did it ourselves each Sunday, but on how well we helped train others to do it too. If churches want great worship leaders in the future, they must invest in not-yet-great worship leaders in the present. Imagine, then, one of those congregations so effectively implementing this player-development model that they are able to groom more worship leaders than they actually have places for them to serve. Then imagine the kingdom value of that congregation getting to farm out those trained leaders to other congregations who were not as prepared to fill their own vacancies.

TEAM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What system do we presently have in place to secure players, singers, and tech substitutes when team members are absent?
- How are we encouraging younger artists to develop their skills for potential worship leadership in the future?
- Within the limitations of our budget, leadership, and facilities, how can we implement a formal or informal training process for younger worship leaders?
- What opportunities do we have or can we create for younger leaders to use their gifts publicly before they are ready to lead in the primary worship services?

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Chapter 1

OUR ROLE MODEL FOR WORSHIP

*KEY QUESTION:
HOW DID JESUS WORSHIP?*

Are you a leader or a follower? Chances are you've been asked that question at some point in time. Maybe it was an employer attempting to take you to the next level in the company, a school guidance counselor helping you decide on a career path, or a parent who was trying to get you on track after you started following the wrong crowd. Most of the time the role of leader is implied to be the better of the two options. Our culture tends to exalt leaders over followers.

By contrast, Jesus seems to view things a little differently. He presents an alternative picture of the measure of one's value. Unlike our bent toward exalting leadership, Jesus lifts up the role of follower—his follower. Jesus never issued a call to “Come lead with me,” but he issued plenty of calls to “Come, follow me.” (See Mark 1:17, 20; Matt 8:22, 9:9, etc.) Along the way, excellent followers become effective leaders, but they become special kinds of leaders—servant leaders—the kinds of leaders that God has in mind for the church and the world.

Describing How We Worship Now

Becoming a Disciple

Jesus used a very common word for those who would answer the call to follow him: *disciple*. A disciple is simply someone who devotedly follows a noted leader or teacher. Throughout time, many different religions, movements, or schools of thought have developed around a significant teacher who attracted learners who became disciples of their leader. The term is not unique to Christianity. In Jesus's own time there were many philosophers and rabbis who influenced a particular followership. Like them, Jesus consistently referred to his followers as his disciples. All Christians, by virtue of their allegiance to Jesus Christ, are known as his disciples.

A disciple is a learner. One who discipled others is a teacher. Discipleship is the process of becoming more and more like the teacher in one's thinking, practices, and way of life. By doing this, an end result is realized: the learner resembles the teacher. Teachers have the ultimate goal of reproducing themselves in their students; for example, a recognized artist who instructs her pupils in special techniques that influence their own budding artistic creations, or a social activist who pursues peace through nonviolence and helps others to do the same, or an athletic coach who imparts his particular method of performance on the field, and so forth. Good teachers not only instruct by using words. Perhaps more importantly, they influence their disciples through modeling their methods.

In the same way, every disciple has the ultimate goal of becoming like his or her teacher. The relationship between the teacher and the disciple is a close one. Disciples are serious about their followership. They watch the master teacher, listen, and ask questions, all the while noting the processes she or he uses to produce the end result. Disciples also use the same disciplines that are central to the teacher's approach. (Notice how closely the two words relate: disciples and

disciplines.) Particular disciplines help in the training process of becoming disciples who resemble the teacher.

Imitation is the key to discipleship. Step by step, through careful imitation, disciples become formed in the image of their teacher. Other people begin to identify disciples according to their resemblance to the teacher. As followers of Jesus, we spend significant time with the Master Teacher, discovering what is important to him, listening, questioning, processing, and observing, and all the while being formed in his image. As Jesus said, “Disciples aren’t greater than their teacher, but whoever is fully prepared will be like their teacher” (Luke 6:40).

A New Take on WWJD

Quite a few years ago, an acronym became popular among some Christian groups. It appeared on wristbands, necklaces, bumper stickers, and posters. WWJD: What would Jesus do? The idea was that Christians should consider what Jesus would likely do in any given circumstance and then try to imitate him in their response. It was clever and no doubt helpful, but some folks had their questions. Could we positively know what Jesus would do in every situation? Is it possible to do the right actions without having the right heart? Should we focus on doing or being? Questions aside, the movement was well intentioned. WWJD bracelets are still around.

This book focuses on a different acronym: HWJW: How would Jesus worship? Have you ever thought about Jesus as a worshiper? How *did* Jesus worship? What were his patterns and priorities? What does he teach us through his actions related to worship? If we had only Jesus’s life of worship to observe, what would we gain in our own worship discipleship?

.....
*If we had only Jesus’s life of worship to observe, what
would we gain in our own worship discipleship?*
.....

Here we have more concrete things to go on than mere speculation. We're not really left wondering what Jesus would do in worship; we can *see* what he did by reading the Gospel accounts of his life of worship while he was among us as a worshiper. And while it's possible to follow Jesus's worship patterns and do so without complete understanding at first, worship will form us as we continue in its discipline.

If our goal is to follow Jesus as his disciples in worship, we must ask this most important question: How did Jesus worship?

.....
Key Question: How did Jesus worship?
.....

Discovering How Jesus Worshiped

Worshiping Like Jesus: Discovering What Jesus Did and Taught

Jesus was a worshiper. And if discipleship is a matter of following the model and teachings of the Master, the starting place is to discover what the Master modeled and taught. We must understand the role worship played in his life so that we can follow his lead. He is our role model and mentor for discovering and practicing the essential aspects of worship as he lived them every day. It is incredibly important to examine Jesus's own life of worship so that we may answer these questions:

- What did Jesus do as a worshiper?
- What did Jesus teach about worship?
- What may we conclude was important to Jesus as a worshiper?
- What are the implications for Jesus's followers today as they worship?

Our Role Model for Worship

What Jesus *did* and what he *taught* concerning worship are essential to know as Christ-followers. For how can we worship in ways that are pleasing to God unless we follow our Teacher in his ways of worship?

What did Jesus *do* as a worshiper? The four Gospel accounts of Jesus's life (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) present Jesus as someone who modeled a devoted and disciplined life of worship in community. He was a worshiper from birth who consistently, even daily, worshiped at the temple and the synagogue, kept the Sabbath, spent much time in prayer, participated in the regular worship rituals, worshiped God in defiance of Satan, read the scriptures in the synagogue service, cleansed the temple, celebrated the Jewish annual festivals of worship, pronounced blessings upon people, sang the liturgy, preached, and taught in the temple and synagogue. It is truly amazing to discover what was significant to Jesus when it came to public worship.

What did Jesus *teach* about worship? Again, with the Gospels as our source, we discover that Jesus provided oral instruction to his disciples. In so doing, he often challenged the status quo. He taught that the Father seeks worshipers, that worship is offered in spirit and in truth, that he was Lord even of the Sabbath, that there is an important connection between the sacrifices one presents to God and the kind of life one lives, that reconciliation has a lot to do with worship that is pleasing to God, that there are certain rules for public prayer, that sacrificial giving is pleasing to God, and that justice and mercy are the fruits of true worship. The Rabbi had some things to say about worship! Throughout the chapters of this book, these fascinating aspects of Jesus the worshiper will be explored in detail.

We have before us an urgent call to discover what our Teacher, Jesus, would show us if he were among us today. If we could watch him or hear him, what would we learn about worship? I imagine it might turn a few things upside down. Worship, as we have come to know it today, may even come unhinged. That's OK. Maybe it

needs to. This book is about the importance of becoming Christian disciples who learn to worship God, and the best way to do so is by imitating Jesus's ways of worship. There's a lot to imitate, really, for there is more recorded in the Gospels about Jesus participating in worship than his actual teachings about worship, though we will draw upon both. Our greatest avenue for worship discipleship is becoming devoted followers of the worshipping Jesus through imitation.

Deliberating How Jesus Would Worship Today

Worship Discipleship

When someone comes to faith in Christ, discipleship is the next step. Most discipleship programs have concentrated on questions like these: How does a new believer learn to pray, read the Bible, share their faith, and serve others? Few discipleship plans have explicitly addressed the question “How does a new believer learn to worship God?” Yet this is the most urgent question, for worship lies at the heart of our relationship with God and the church. In fact, worship is the eternal point; it is the evidence that the mission of God has been completed when the new heaven and the new earth become the temple of God (Rev 21:1-5; 22). Ultimately, worship is the mission of God.

Unfortunately, discipling worshipers is often overlooked. Somewhere along the line we assumed that new believers would just catch on to proper worship by attending church. However, the risk of that approach is to assume that most people who attend church have been intentionally taught to worship God when they likely have not. Over time, without effective worship discipleship, it is possible to reproduce improper worship without meaning to do so.

Examples of Worship Discipleship (Biblical and Historical)

Worship discipleship is nothing new. It was a major theme throughout the Old Testament. For example, Moses insisted that Israel's elders intentionally instruct their children *throughout all generations* as to the meaning of the most profound worship event in their history—the Passover. Even before God's people had left Egypt, God instituted an annual worship ritual for every household to observe perpetually. The community was advised to take worship discipleship seriously: “You should observe this ritual as a regulation for all time for you and your children. . . . And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ritual mean to you?’ you will say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, for the LORD passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt. When he struck down the Egyptians, he spared our houses’” (Exod 12:24, 26-27). The very hearing of Moses's instructions became an occasion of worship: “The people then bowed down and worshiped” (Exod 12:27b). The emphasis upon worship discipleship in the Jewish faith is seen often throughout the Old Testament.¹

Later on, during the early centuries of Christianity, the church developed a detailed plan to systematically disciple new believers in the Christian faith. A significant part of the program included educating believers as to the meaning of worship and instructing them in how to fulfill their very important role as a participant in worship. Their instruction included guidance in how to pray within the community, how to hear and receive the word of God preached, the meaning of one's baptism, the meaning of partaking of the Lord's table, and the relationship between worship and living lives of integrity and service.

This discipleship program, which eventually took several years for learners to complete, later came to be called the *catechumenate*² because teachers and students engaged in *catechesis*,³ the process of instructing learners through oral means. (*Catechesis* means to give

Chapter 1

instruction orally.)⁴ The oral format took different forms over the centuries; but regardless of the form that was used, teachers vocalized words of instruction while the students let their teaching “resound in the ear and the heart.”⁵ Having received the teaching, learners allowed it to resonate within them and form them as they gained understanding that, in turn, helped them to become more faithful worshipers. Information resulted in formation.

In this ancient process, worship discipleship occurred as much through imitation as through oral instruction. Students would imitate the actions and the attitudes of their teachers in worship; they would then engage with the oral instruction in order to form their understanding. Imitation was followed by explanation; understanding followed action. This approach to discipleship is at the core of the early Christian model. Thus, the church carefully and systematically transmitted the teachings of the faith concerning worship (and other topics) as a means of Christian discipleship. In fact, *discipleship* was the very term preferred by the church fathers for this process.⁶ From the beginning of the church and occurring through many centuries, new Christians were discipled first as worshipers.

.....
*From the beginning of the church, new Christians were
discipled first as worshipers.*
.....

All Christian disciples are formed *in* worship *by* worship. The scriptures we hear, the songs we sing, the prayers we pray, the sermons we heed, the offerings we give, the Communion elements we share, the sense of love we feel from fellow worshipers—all of this and more unites in the power of the Spirit to change us toward Christlikeness. Worship is a highly transforming event. It is such a formational force that it is sometimes referred to as “primary theology”—the most significant occasion from which our understanding of God originates.

To be honest, for many years I had not considered how corporate worship is formational in nature. I had the idea that *I formed*

Our Role Model for Worship

worship; I have since discovered that *worship forms me*. I misunderstood the purposes of worship, thinking that it consisted largely of a service that people created in order to express themselves to God and to be inspired to live better Christian lives. It didn't occur to me that participating in the worship event is, in itself, an act of intentional spiritual formation. I have come to see that when worshipers participate faithfully and devotionally in the liturgy of their worship service (every church has its liturgy), they become deeply formed by what is said and done. Worship is a primary means through which our view of God and the world is reshaped in an ongoing way. But not only our *view* is changed. More importantly, through true worship our *affections*—that which/whom we come to love—are amended. Corporate worship disciplines us in patterns of faith *and* patterns of love. The way of worship discipleship can be summarized this way: do as I do, come to believe what I believe, love what I love.

Current Challenge

Worship in local churches has changed a great deal over time, and most especially in the last fifty years in North America. In many places, worship would be virtually unrecognizable from that which took place even just a few years ago. Change can be good. Every generation must reconsider certain critical variables as they seek to worship God in their own time and place. But the question emerges: Who/what are we imitating when we adapt our practices of worship? Do worship practices find their source in the Teacher's way of worship? Or do we imitate another master?

In many churches, practices continue to migrate toward the latest cultural trends. Trends themselves are neither good nor bad until they are evaluated in terms of God's expectations for worship. However, it is wise to be cautious because we can inadvertently discover that we have chosen to imitate a person or a procedure or a product before asking, how would Jesus worship (HWJW)? Let me be clear at the beginning of this book. My concerns do not revolve around

styles of worship. Sadly, battles over worship styles have so commonly been referred to as “worship wars” that everyone knows what the phrase means without explaining it. Whatever worship discipleship is, it rises above issues of style (though style considerations are not irrelevant). Often people will ask me, “What’s next in worship?” That very question suggests that we are trend-thirsty. Too often we ask, “What’s popular in worship today?” or “What would you like to see in worship?” or “What are the larger churches doing?”

I think it’s time to ask the more relevant question: How would Jesus worship (HWJW)? If Jesus were present today, how *would* he

worship? As this book unfolds chapter by chapter, we will take a look at this question from various vantage points and then draw implications for contemporary Christ-followers. We will do this because “the one who claims to remain in him ought to live in the same way as he lived” (1 John 2:6).



Do you hear the call—the call of Jesus? “Come follow me . . . in worship!”

Determining How I Will Worship

Reflection

After looking at our role model for worship, it’s time to determine what adjustments our Master Teacher may be asking of his disciples. To begin, consider these questions:

- How do you think Jesus would worship today if he were here as before?

Our Role Model for Worship

- Do you think he would alter his patterns and practices? If so, in what way?
- If I'm a disciple of Jesus, how willing am I to follow the Leader in worship?
- What might I have to do differently?
- What might I have to give up? Add on?
- How would my attitude change?
- How would my focus change?

Imagine

It's next Sunday. You've pulled into the parking lot at your church. You've walked through the door into the worship space. You remember that you are a learner and that Jesus is your role model for how you will worship right now.

- Identify one specific way that your approach to worship will be different than last Sunday.
- As you begin reading and studying this book, what invitation do you believe God is offering you personally as a follower of Jesus?
- As a result, what one concrete action step will you take this Sunday and every Sunday thereafter?

Action

With God's help, I determine that the next time I worship I will

_____.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,

Thank you for calling me to be your disciple. Help me to follow you in true worship discipleship. Send the Holy Spirit to strengthen me to be your follower. May God receive the glory.

Amen.

ADAM HAMILTON

Best-selling author of *Unleashing the Word*

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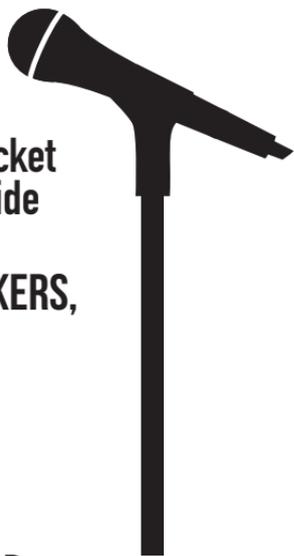
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**ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR SPEAKERS,
LEADERS, AND PREACHERS**

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SPEAKING WELL:
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Chapter One

ASK THREE QUESTIONS

We'll begin with what may be the most important component to giving an effective speech: asking the right questions. There are three very simple questions your talk, speech, or sermon should be built upon: why? who? and what?

WHY?

When I'm asked to give a speech, talk, or sermon outside of my home church, I want to know, **Why am I being asked to speak? Why me? Why are others being asked to listen to me?** The underlying question is really about the purpose, aim, or mission of the talk. Sometimes those who ask you to speak aren't clear about the answers to these questions. They may say, "Well, we needed someone to talk at our event and we heard you're a good speaker." Sometimes they follow this with, "You can talk on anything you want to, just be inspirational!"

Here's what I've found: The less clarity I have around the purpose, the mission, the goal, or the why of a talk I'm going to give, the harder it is to prepare and the less effective my talk is. The greater clarity I have around the mission or purpose of the talk, the more likely I am to feel the talk was effective.

When someone isn't clear about the why of the talk they hope I'll give, I'll spend time trying to help them work through this. I may begin by asking them to describe the mission of their organization and the purpose of the particular event where I'll be speaking.

For preachers preparing and delivering a weekly message for their local church, the sermon should serve the mission, vision, and goals of the local church. For those who speak in the workplace, it is critically important that your presentations and talks align with the mission and purpose of your organization. If you are in charge in your organization, and speaking, you must answer these essential questions for yourself—no one else will answer them for you.

WHO?

Once you are clear about the mission or purpose, of both the group you are speaking to and the particular speech you are going to give, your next step is to know to whom you will be speaking. What will be on their hearts and minds as you speak to them? What might they need to hear from you? I find this is an easier task with the congregation I serve, since I know them

well. It requires more homework when I'm speaking to groups with which I'm less familiar.

I was recently asked to give a ten-minute talk to caregivers in the community—therapists, pastors, rabbis, and others who devote a great deal of their time to caring for people who struggle. I knew that the people in this audience often feel burned-out and overwhelmed from bearing the burdens of others. As I began to work on my talk, I thought about what I might share that would offer encouragement to this particular group and their unique situation. Know your audience, understand the challenges they face, and consider the questions and concerns they are wrestling with. This will enable you to offer a timely and relevant message.

When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered his first inaugural address in 1933 the country was in the midst of the Great Depression. Fear had gripped the nation and hopelessness was in the air. What Roosevelt knew was that he needed to calm these fears, reassure the country, and communicate to the nation that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Eighty years later, we still recall these words as some of the most compelling in any inaugural address, but they were written in response to FDR's clear understanding of people's needs.

WHAT?

Finally, in light of the why and the who, I begin looking for the what. I begin asking, “What do I want my hearers to

know? What do I want them to feel or experience? And what do I want them to do in response to this message?” These questions correspond to the head, the heart, and the hands. You may recognize them as three of the four Hs of the 4-H clubs. The founders of 4-H believed that people learn and develop best when they engage their heads (intellect), hearts (emotions), and hands (action). This premise is important for speakers as well. Answer the what question, and you’re more likely to include material that resonates with more people, on multiple levels, in multiple ways. You’ll also be ready to begin writing your speech with a strong and focused idea of what your content should include.

As a speaker you should know why you are speaking, you should understand the people to whom you are speaking, and you should be clear about what you want those people to know, feel, and do as a response to your message.



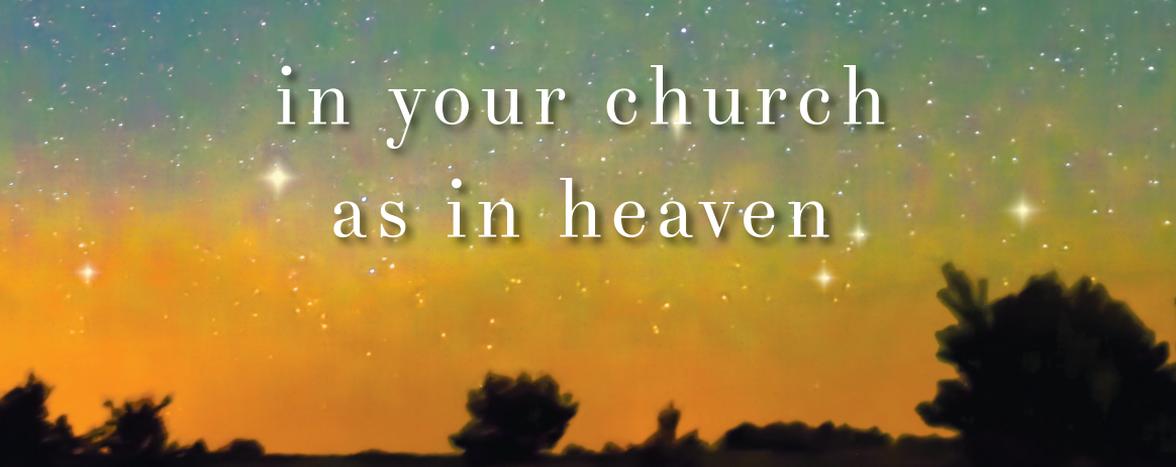
**THE FIRST TASK IN SPEAKING WELL IS TO ANSWER
THESE QUESTIONS: WHY? WHO? AND WHAT?**



Worship



Together



in your church
as in heaven

Josh Davis / Nikki Lerner

★
Worship[★] ★
Together



in your church
as in heaven

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Chapter 1

Who Are We?



Stories are important. Where people come from is important. History affects the present and the future. Get to know us.

Josh's Story

I grew up in (was born into really!) a church that loved music and the nations. It has taken me until today to fully realize it because they were so . . . well . . . reserved. I can remember discussions during Sunday lunch about someone who started the clapping after a special music number at church. Clapping was not forbidden, but it certainly was not welcomed either. I can remember the few people whom I ever saw raise their hands in worship. None of them had grown up in our church. They were outsiders, transplants. And I remember the very few people who sang loud enough to be heard by someone sitting two pews in front of them. My mom was one of those high-volume singers. It used to embarrass me. Now, I am quite proud. It's funny how perspectives change.

I grew up in an all-White, traditional church. We sang hymns. Lots of them. All the time. Except, I can remember once when “Jews for Jesus” came and sang some Messianic music. It was so different. So other. So captivating. I went around for weeks after singing “Jehovah-Jireh, my Provider, His grace is sufficient for me, for me, for me.”¹ And then, I can remember when we started a contemporary service at 8:00 a.m., and some girls sang a song out of a chorus book and were accompanied only by the piano. And I can remember the controversy those choruses caused.

1. Merla Watson, “Jehovah-Jireh,” MCA Music Publ., A.D.O. Universal Studio, 1974.

Chapter 1

I grew up in a very missions-minded church. Which means we had a missionary's name in the bulletin every week for us to pray for. And we had a map on the wall in the foyer with a bunch of people's pictures attached to it. And we had missions conferences. Every year. And I loved them! I loved getting to dress up in a traditional costume and carry a flag from another country. I loved getting the chance to have missionaries in our home for lunch or dinner. I loved hearing their stories and learning about other cultures. I loved going to their seminars and seeing slide shows of different people and places. I especially loved it when they let us use their blowguns or we would try to translate words from an unknown language using some principles they taught us. I learned so many good things growing up in my church. I learned to love God's word. I learned how to be a community that knows and cares for one another. I learned about what God was doing in other parts of the world. My church loved the nations, and I am grateful. But, practically speaking, we loved the nations from a distance and with special fervor during one week each year. We never sang the songs of the nations. We rarely, if ever, loved the nations in our midst.

The town I lived in had what was called "Newtown," which was the neighborhood, centered around MLK Jr. Boulevard, where most of the African Americans lived. I lived in an all-White neighborhood, was home-schooled (mostly), and went to an all-White church until I was thirteen years old. At which time, my family moved first to Costa Rica and then to the Dominican Republic to become missionaries. My life radically changed on so many levels. I began to learn Spanish and strangely found that I not only was good at it but also quite enjoyed it. Something in me came alive when I spoke Spanish. My friends would say that I sounded like an entirely different person when I was speaking Spanish. It was in the Dominican Republic that I began to experience worship in a different way. All of the sudden, I was part of a church that was very expressive in their worship. They sang loudly. They clapped their hands. They raised their hands. They prayed prayers out loud and for extended periods of time. And something in me came alive. This was more like how I expressed my worship to God in private. And in my church in the Dominican Republic, I had the freedom to do so in public.

When I came back to the United States, however, I found some interesting things. I have found that I no longer fit in one world or another. I am not entirely at home in the United States. I do not fit completely in the Dominican Republic either. I like to call myself a multicultural mutt. On the outside

Who Are We?

I look simple enough. White. American, like the cheese. But can you tell by looking that the American in me is time oriented and values productivity while the Dominican in me is event oriented and values relationship? Can you tell by looking at me that I have a Sudanese friend whose heart is so similar to mine that we call each other twin brothers? Never mind that he is well over six feet tall and his skin is as black as I have ever seen. Can you tell by looking at me that I can sing worship songs in more than eighteen languages off the top of my head and that, on any given day, one of those songs might come out of my mouth and my heart during my own personal time with the Lord? Can you tell that my first choice for worship music is gospel music and my second choice is Hindi? Can you tell by looking at me that I am learning American Sign Language so that I can communicate with my Deaf neighbor? Can you tell that I have been in worship leadership in a Baptist church, a nondenominational church, a United Methodist church, and a Mennonite Charismatic church? Can you tell by looking at me what church I should go to? Or what church I shouldn't go to?

I have two heart languages, English and Spanish. I have also found that more often than not, I have to choose whether I will be American or Latino when I go to church. Will I sing in English or Spanish? It is this tension inside me that in many ways has led me to consider why the body of Christ is so segregated when it comes to worship. It is this tension, combined with the power of the word of God that has led me to found Proskuneo Ministries (www.proskuneo.org). Proskuneo exists to glorify God and promote unity in the body of Christ through multilingual, multicultural worship gatherings, worship resources, and training in order that lives may be transformed and nations come together to worship God. In the last eleven years, I have devoted my life to seeing multicultural worship happen. And I fully expect to live the rest of my life praying for and working toward that glimpse of God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Our Friendship

I have a few people in my life who I can remember distinctly the moment I met them. Nikki is the *only* person who I can remember seeing as a stranger in a crowd before I met her. We were both traveling to a conference in New Orleans, and she came from Maryland and had to change planes in Atlanta. It just so happened we were on the same plane from Atlanta to New Orleans.

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And I can remember seeing her in the waiting area. She had a presence. (She still does!) She was confident and gracious. My wife says she is regal. I agree. It wasn't until hours later that we saw each other again in the lobby of the conference hotel and realized that we were brother and sister in Christ and both had a passion for multicultural worship. Amazing! I immediately sensed a family bond with Nikki (and we have some ridiculous pictures to prove it!), but I had no idea that I would be so profoundly affected by her and so incredibly blessed by her friendship and partnership in ministry. Now, only a few years later, we have written songs together, cotaught at conferences, led worship together, and ministered together on every coast of the United States and internationally! We have led and taught and loved each other's people. Our families have vacationed together. We have prayed for each other, challenged each other, asked each other difficult questions. And now, we are writing a book together. We love doing life together and worshipping God together.

We are learning what it is to work together. To lean on each other's strengths. To cover for each other's weaknesses. We understand that we are better together than we are apart. There have been many times that she said something I couldn't say, or said it in a way that I could never have said it. And vice versa. We are learning never to underestimate the impact of diverse people working together. We have been told many times that even the visual of me and Nikki leading and following each other is powerful. I have a tremendous amount of respect for Nikki's thoughtful leadership. She is a reflector. She has a gift of connecting with people and setting people at ease in her presence. People are drawn to her. She is courageous in the face of conflict, and when she knows what needs to be done, she does it, unapologetically. She challenges, empowers, and frees the people she leads to become leaders. I have a lot to learn from her. And I am looking forward to what I will learn, even as we coauthor this book.

Nikki's Story

"Jesus who?" That sort of sums up my knowledge of all things God-related until I was thirteen years old. I grew up in a very loving and good family. Church or anything having to do with God was not a part of our history as a family or even something that we valued. We were, however, what a friend of mine would call "Cheasters" (pronounced *Chee-sters*). We would occasionally go to church on Christmas and Easter with my grandmother, Elaine. I think

that our family had some sort of belief in a “higher power,” but now as I think about it, we may not have even had that. What I do remember is that there actually were times when I would ask to go to church with my grandmother. I think most of that was just to spend time with her, but I remember that I had the desire to go, nonetheless. It wasn’t until my freshman year of high school that I was introduced to matters of faith. I was invited to a weekend retreat with an organization called Young Life by my volleyball team captain. Honestly, the only reason I went was that I thought it would be cool to hang out with her. It was at this retreat that I first heard about Jesus and that I could actually have a relationship with him. My response to the gospel went something like this: “Well, that just makes sense.” And now, here I am, walking faithfully with Christ. Jesus sought me out and initiated his presence in my life, and now I am forever changed. In fact, that is one of my very own names for God, “the Initiator.”

Apparently, I was never “Black enough.” Or at least, that’s what I was told by some members of my family. Not all of them, mind you. My mother’s side of the family had always lived very multicultural lives. I am grateful for that as I write this today. People of many different races always surrounded us, and we always lived in communities that were multicultural. I had friends of different ethnicities, and I dated, romantically, outside of my race throughout the years. For the other members of my family, this multicultural lifestyle posed a particular problem. I remember my stepfather asking me to please initiate more friendships with African American kids. I remember some family members giving me a hard time because my boyfriends were not Black. When I asked them what the big deal was, their response was that they were concerned that I would lose sight of my heritage, my “Blackness.” I remember being accused of “talking White” because I did not have a particular accent that could be associated with some African American cultures. I was even told by a family member that teachers in my school only liked me because I had White friends and because I wasn’t really a Black person at all. It was tough at times. I believe that I could have had a huge identity crisis had it not been for a few strong women in my family (namely, my mother, her sister, and my grandmother) who taught me that people were the same no matter what their skin color and heritage. Not only that, but also they were to be affirmed, not in spite of, but because of how they were made by God. It is this heritage along with observing the tension between these two worldviews that are an important piece of the tapestry of my life and passion today.

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I am married to a wonderful man who is White. Given what you just read, that's a big shocker, right? Contrary to some opinion, I didn't go out looking for a White man, and I didn't marry him because of his money (which he doesn't have) or any reason other than the fact that I am smart and I know a gift from the Lord when I see one. My husband, David, and I had been dating for less than one month when he proposed to me. I know, I know, that sounds crazy, right? But have you ever heard married people say something like "when you know, you know"? Well, I knew. While engaged, we thought that it would be important to decide whose church we would attend. There was only one problem: neither of us particularly cared for the other's place of worship. I was almost positive that he would just love the church that I was attending at the time, and I was so excited to bring him there. What I didn't expect to hear from David was the following question, "Where are all the Black people?" Hmmm. Honestly, that had never occurred to me. You see, since beginning to follow Jesus Christ when I was thirteen years old, most of my church experience, with the exception of a two-year experience at an African American Pentecostal church, had been in mostly Caucasian churches. In fact, growing up, I remember that my family was usually one of two or three Black families in a room wherever we went. My Aunt Fannie (God rest her soul) would always say something like, "We are the only chocolate chips in a room full of vanilla wafers." Ha! So, the fact that I was attending a predominantly Caucasian church never seemed to be an issue. I was quite intrigued that my White, soon-to-be husband felt so uncomfortable in such a uni-cultural environment. We decided to look for a church where we both felt comfortable to worship. Our church-search was not an easy one. Because we are an interracial couple, we get stared at wherever we go. My mother-in-law swears that it is just because we are tall, but I think she's just trying to be nice. It was no different for us while trying to find a church home. You tend to stick out when you walk into churches where you are the only ones who are "different." In fact, some studies have shown that couples like us end up not going to church at all because our families stick out and people don't quite know what to do with us.

In 1999, six months before we were to be married, we walked through the doors of Bridgeway Community Church in Columbia, Maryland (www.bridgewayonline.org). A friend of ours found Bridgeway in the phone book and was so excited to call us and tell us about this church that he found. His sales pitch? "There are seven interracial couples here!" That's what he said.

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Well, that was enough for us to go check it out. I will never forget what it felt like to walk into the doors of that church. I remember feeling like we finally fit. No one stared. We saw other couples who were like us and couples who were not like us at all! We saw multiracial people and children everywhere! After finding our seat in the meeting space and just taking in everything that we saw, we knew we were home. We were just praying that the church was biblically sound and that the people weren't crazy; well, they are crazy, but a good kind of crazy. We decided to make Bridgeway Community Church our home. Since that time, we have been on the ride of our lives, and God has given us the desire of our hearts—desires that we didn't even know existed. Who could've guessed that we would be ministered to and encouraged not only in our faith but also in our culture as people? Who could've guessed that I would be leading a worship ministry made up of more than one hundred amazing people? Who could've guessed that I would be writing this book and passing along all of the knowledge that the Lord has given me as I benefited from serving him in a beautiful and vibrant multicultural congregation of more than forty-five hundred people? God knew. And I am grateful. The story continues . . .

Our Story

Josh and I met in August of 2009 at a small, fifteen-person retreat in New Orleans, Louisiana. We get a kick out of telling the story of how we were actually on the same flight headed out to New Orleans. Apparently, Josh saw me in the airport terminal, and I noticed him while boarding the plane. He was on the left side of the plane and looked up from reading his book as I was coming down the aisle. Our eyes actually met, and the first thing I thought to myself was, “I wonder if that guy knows Jesus.” He just had that look about him—you know, that look?

Later that day, we found ourselves in the same room with a group of about thirteen other worship pastors and leaders. This special group spent two and a half days together, sharing stories, struggles, successes, and strategies with regard to multicultural worship, and ever since then our hearts have been connected.

After our time together at that retreat, we both knew that the Lord had allowed us to meet each other and become friends for a very special purpose. There is a verse in Ephesians 2:21 in which the Apostle Paul says, “We

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are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord” (NLT). I believe that God has Josh and me together to accomplish the work of the kingdom that we could not do apart from each other. We share the same heart and vision for all of God’s people to come together in worshipping our great God. Since 2009, we have led worship together, taught classes on multiethnic ministry, cowritten songs together, stayed in each other’s homes, ministered to young emerging leaders, and dreamed big about the future together. We believe that two are better than one because they have a good return for their work (Eccl 4:9-12). We believe that writing this book together models the very principles that lie within it. And we really just like working and creating together.