

## Nine Guidelines for Those who Plan and Lead Group Worship



Plan worship that exalts God, edifies believers and brings seekers to Jesus. Worship leaders should prepare themselves by praying and studying God's Word. Along with their co-workers, they should plan worship activities ahead of time using these guidelines:

### 1. Let worship activities fit the size of the group.

- New congregations often start as a tiny group that has to worship in a way that fits a small number of new believers.
- The entire flock should take part actively, not just watch and listen passively. Actually, a small group can achieve real worship easier than can a big group.

- When praising God, help folks to think about God rather than about beautiful music or about how well worship leaders perform.
- Choose songs and other worship activities that focus on God. Worship activities that focus on what people do and learn are good for other aspects of worship, but not for the praise time.
- Avoid assuming that you need expensive musical instruments, and avoid seeking to have musicians that perform so beautifully that many believers stop singing praises and simply listen passively. Avoid having the people admire the performers rather than admiring God.

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**2. Choose worship activities that fit the occasion, please the worshippers, meet their current needs and respect local customs.**

- Avoid a constant sameness that limits believers' freedom to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Each Paul-Timothy study for new shepherds suggests various activities to choose from, for worship.
- Pray and plan worship activities together with co-workers, well ahead of time.
- Avoid having leaders import worship forms from other cultures and seldom varying them to meet current needs or local customs.
- If unbelievers are present, then include activities that will help them to discover Christ and to believe in Him.
- Avoid leaders planning every detail of the worship and making no changes in their plans, not even for salvation of seekers.
- Let serious, older men oversee how meetings are led, even if others lead the meetings. Older men should ask younger men and children to lead some parts of the meetings.

- Avoid believers expressing angry feelings about what other congregations believe or do.
- 8. Provide believers with opportunities to give to God.**
- Let believers know how offerings are used to extend Christ's Kingdom and meet people's needs. In small groups, some believers prefer to give in a way that others will not notice.
  - Avoid leaders begging for money, embarrassing those who cannot give, and seldom telling how offerings are spent.
  - Avoid leaders buying material things and supporting themselves when other believers have more urgent needs for which Jesus wants believers to give.
  - Set up financial accounts that are supervised by a treasurer chosen by the congregation.
- 9. Have meetings deal mostly with things that edify.**
- During prayer and planning times, let believers focus on building people up. Do so by adding new activities. For example, they should seek to add new believers, baptize, initiate activities that the New Testament requires of a congregation, start new congregations and cells, train new leaders, plan visits to bless believers and friends, organize teams to serve people who suffer.
  - Avoid taking most of the time to deal with negative things such as sickness, doctrinal differences, sins in the community and common problems. Always take some time for positive things that edify the body.

- Even though women and young people have more time to prepare lessons, do not allow them to dominate meetings, lest they deter serious men who would lead better.
- 3. Let all of the believers participate actively.**
- Let children of all ages participate. Paul-Timothy children's studies provide Bible stories that correspond to the shepherd's weekly topic, so that the children can dramatize the topic for the adults. Children's studies also include poems, usually from the Psalms, that children can recite, and questions that they can ask the adults.
  - Avoid having the children stay in a separate room most or all of the time; let them take part with adults during the teaching and praising.
  - Avoid letting the main leader or leaders take up most of the worship time. Let everyone get to know each other and to love one another.
  - Avoid having adults do all of the teaching and manage all of the projects, lest older children become bored and do mischief. Help worshippers to obey the New Testament's one-another commands.
  - Give believers an opportunity to report to the congregation what they are doing for Christ.
  - Let believers talk and pray together in little groups of two, three or four persons. So doing gives everyone an opportunity to be heard, to ask questions, to plan activities, to counsel others and to pray. Let believers spend time with folks who feel badly or have problems. Pray for the sick, for the lost and for one another.
  - Avoid programmed activities taking up all the time. Provide ample time without planned activities for people simply to enjoy fellowship with each other, and to get to know each other well. Let them talk unhurriedly one with another and pray one with another.
  - Keep the group small enough to do this by starting new groups.

- Form the seating in a circle. Avoid having believers sit passively like children in a classroom, seeing only the backs of others' heads.
- Avoid having one or two persons dominate the discussion. During discussion, let shepherds correct people who talk or complain too much. Let leaders shift attention from talkative people by saying, "Let us hear from someone who has not spoken yet". Help everyone to feel free to talk and to give opinions.
- Avoid letting individuals always seek the attention of the group. Some folk complain about their problems in every meeting. They enjoy being a victim of bad circumstances. There are other people who are so proud and dogmatic that they want to speak the final word about any topic.

Teach the believers to read or act out Scripture in a dramatic way. Many Bible stories contain conversation between people. A Narrator can read parts that are not conversation. For example:

A Narrator reads parts of Genesis 3.

A man reads and acts out what Adam says and does.

A woman takes Eve's parts.

Another adult takes Satan's parts.

Someone else speaks God's words.

#### 4. Let the Holy Spirit harmonize the use of different spiritual gifts, such that believers serve one another in love as one body.

- 1 Corinthians chapters 12 through 13 require that believers use the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit has given each one, interacting with each other in loving harmony like organs of the body. Avoid organizing isolated programs and departments that keep people separated from other believers with different spiritual gifts. Do not

#### 7. During praise, let believers feel the awesome presence of God and let them become serious.

- Plan a definite beginning and an ending to the group worship time. Here is a list of activities that can begin worship:
- Use verses from Psalms or other worshipful passages to help begin worship. Here are some examples:

Psalm 8:1

Psalm 9:1-2

Psalm 18:1-2

Psalm 29:1-2

Psalm 34:1-3

Psalm 42:1

Psalm 47:1-2

Psalm 66:1-4

Psalm 67:1-3

Psalm 81:1

Psalm 84:1-2

Psalm 89:1

Psalm 95:1-3

Psalm 97:1

Psalm 98:1-2

Psalm 100

Psalm 104:1

Psalm 105:1-3

Psalm 113:1-6

Psalm 103:1

Psalm 111:1-3

Psalm 117

Psalm 123:1

Psalm 136:1-4

Psalm 147:1

Psalm 145:1-2

Psalm 148:1-2

Psalm 149:1-4

Psalm 150

Habakkuk 2:20

Rev. 7:9-12

Rev. 2:7

Rev. 22:6-7

- Ask the Holy Spirit to prepare your hearts for worship and to show the Presence of Christ.
- Make sure that everyone knows that they have really worshipped.
- Avoid an atmosphere that is too informal and familiar, failing to sense the awesome presence of the Most Holy One.

Here are some other things that can enhance worship:

- Pray for other churches in the area, even if they are more traditional and do things differently.
- Gently correct people who have left other churches in anger and who criticize them too much.
- Avoid speaking with a critical spirit, criticizing pastors and churches that do things differently.

10. As an example of confession, read David's confession in Psalm 51:1-10.

- Some congregations serve everyone with one cup, and the believers dip their bread in the cup. Others prefer many individual cups. Some churches use grape juice or another beverage instead of wine. All of these different methods are acceptable.
- Avoid letting the Lord's Supper become simply another teaching time, without experiencing its wonderful mystery.
- Avoid hurrying congregation through it without believers confessing their sins first.
- If serving the Lord's Supper as part of a bigger meal, be careful not to lose a worshipful participation in the body of Christ (1 Cor 10:16). Paul had to correct this kind of error in 1 Corinthians 11:20-34.

#### 6. Let praise take on different forms.

- If there is a need of security from hostile authorities, then let believers sing or chant in a soft voice, and use quieter forms of praise. These can include testimonies of what God has done in recent days, Bible reading, repeating words spoken by a leader, poems, drama, sacred dance and silent meditation.
- Avoid music providing the only form of praise. Avoid leading worship with a beautiful musical performance that does not enable everyone to enter into serious praise. Sing with a style of music that fits all age groups and the local culture.
- Encourage believers to write new songs. Avoid only using songs that are imported from another culture.

do as some traditional churches where believers with the same spiritual gift cluster together and specialize in their type of ministry, having little contact with folk using other gifts.

- Explain during worship the work that will be done during the week. Some of the work activities should correspond to the week's teaching topic. Other activities should deal with unforeseen needs and chances to serve people.
- Let believers mention neighbours and friends who need help, and what they will do to serve them.
- Let believers discuss their suggested activities, and make definite plans about who will help and when. Those plans might include:
  - Praying for each other, the sick, the lost and the demonized,
  - Fellowship,
  - Cooperating with other congregations,
  - Serving the needy,
  - Family devotions.
- Build loving fellowship within and between congregations by obeying the New Testament 'one another' commands.

#### The New Testament's One-Another Commands

##### Love:

- Love one another: John 13:34-35; 5:12, 17; Rom. 12: 10; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 John 3:11,14, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 1:5; 1 Peter 1:22
- Love one another to fulfil the law: Rom. 13:8
- Increase our love one for another: 2 Thess. 1:3
- Abound in love for another: 1 Thess. 3:12
- Love each other deeply, to cover a multitude of sins: 1 Peter 4:8

**Fellowship and reconciliation:**

- Have fellowship one with another: 1 John 1:7
- Forgive one another: Eph. 3:13; 4:32; Col. 3:13
- Greet one another with a holy kiss (an embrace in some cultures): Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14
- Wait for one another to break bread: 1 Cor. 11:33
- Bear one another's sufferings: 1 Cor. 12:26

**Serve:**

- Serve one another with the gifts each person has received: 1 Peter 4:10
- Serve one another in love: Gal. 5:13
- Be kind to each other: 1 Thess. 5:15
- Care for one another: 1 Cor. 12:25
- Bear the burdens one for another: Gal. 6:2
- Wash one another's feet as a sign cleansing: John 13:14
- Work with one another: 1 Cor. 3:9; 2Cor. 6:1

**Teach:**

- Teach one another: Col. 3:16
- Instruct one another: Rom. 5:14

**Encourage:**

- Encourage one another: Col. 3:16; Heb. 10:25
- Exhort one another: Heb. 3:13
- Speak the truth to one another: Eph. 4:25
- Lay down our lives one for another: 1 John 3:16
- Spur one another to love and good deeds: Heb. 10:24

**Pray, confess and edify:**

- Pray for one another: James 5:16
- Confess our sins one to another: James 5:16
- Edify (strengthen, build up) one another: 1 Thess. 4:18 & 5:1, 11
- Edify one another, each one with a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or its interpretation: 1 Cor. 14:26
- Glorify God together: Rom. 15:6

**Build unity with humility:**

- Honour one another: Rom. 12:10
- Be of one mind one with another: 2 Cor. 13:11; Rom. 12:16; 15:5
- Do not criticize one another: Rom. 14:13
- Do not speak bad one of another: James 4:11; 5:9
- Submit to one another: Eph. 5:21
- Be clothed with humility toward one another: 1 Peter 5:5

**Live in harmony:**

- Have patience one with another: Eph. 4:2
- Live in peace one with another: Matt. 9:50
- Receive one another with hospitality: Rom. 15:7; 1 Peter. 4:9

**5. Celebrate the Lord's Supper in a way that allows the Holy Spirit to make everyone aware of the Presence of Christ.**

- Paul-Timothy studies for New Shepherds provide a variety of inspiring Bible texts with which to introduce the Lord's Supper. Before serving it, provide time for believers to confess their sins in prayer to God. Confess private sins in silence. If anyone asks why we confess sins, show him 1 Corinthians 11: 27-31 and I John 1:7-