

WORSHIP

A Course on Worship
in the Christian Church

Second Edition

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This pastoral training program began in 1997 in East Africa. Sixteen dioceses of the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) and four presbyteries of the Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA) partnered with four agencies of the Christian Reformed Church in North America to develop a program to train evangelists, elders, and lay leaders in basic ministry skills.

A series of workshops were held in Nairobi, Kenya for thirty-four pastors from the ACK and the RCEA. These annual seminars were held for three years beginning in 1998 with the aim of developing four training manuals. Dennis Hoekstra wrote the stewardship manual, the pastoral care manual was by Melvin Hugen, preaching by Wilbert Van Dyk, and church education by Robert DeVries. In 2003 a fifth module on worship by Edward Seely was added to the program. As will be seen in this manual, the corporate worship of the church provides a framework as well as links with these and all other aspects of the life and work of the church, not only, obviously, preaching. Harold Kallemeyn contributed greatly to the development and field-testing of all the manuals. Jeffrey Lemke made a significant contribution to the editing and graphics of this second edition.

These manuals and other elements of the training program have been translated into French for use in West Africa and into Spanish for use in Mexico. They have been field-tested for five years in Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, and Mexico.

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The General Objectives of this Worship Manual*

This manual mainly aims to create a self-sustaining, self-perpetuating training program for evangelists, pastors, and lay leaders who are pastoring congregations but have had little or no formal ministry training. It can also be used by individuals for their own learning and service.

- In many countries, one ordained pastor may have responsibility for five to fifteen congregations in his parish in addition to the one he is serving. We have met one pastor who had more than fifty, spread over an area extending for ninety miles. These small congregations were formed when a new Christian began witnessing to his or her family, neighbors, and village. Those who responded to their witness then began to meet for Bible study and worship in a home, under a tree, in a school room, and eventually in their own church building. The one who had evangelized the others often became the leader of the congregation.

These lay leaders were sometimes recognized and ordained as pastors in these independent congregations. More often, however, they were designated as evangelists, lay pastors, lay readers, or elders in a larger parish which had its own trained pastor. This trained pastor is often responsible for supervision, for the sacraments, and for training the lay pastors. The supervising pastors, however, have little time and few materials suitable for such training.

- The main purpose of this manual is to train such supervising pastors, who will become the trainers of others, as Paul advised Timothy. “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2 NASB) These pastors use the training in their own ministry and then train their evangelists and lay leaders. Both the use of the material in their own ministry, and their use of it to teach others, provide a thorough knowledge of each part of the program.
- Manuals in the various areas of ministry provide entry-level training based on a Biblical theology related to that subject. Each manual leads to the development of an Action Plan for that area of ministry.
- The first edition of this manual was originally written to teach pastors’ seminars in Africa. I have also used it, with some modifications included herein, to teach pastors and seminary students in Asia and Latin America. This second edition is an expanded edition to the printed version of this course manual, and is available without cost on my Websites at www.fromacorntoak12.com, which is also accessible at www.edwardseely.com, and <https://seelyedward.academia.edu>.

Edward D. Seely

* The material on this page is an adaptation of a similar statement from the Project Africa manual, *Planning and Organizing Workshops*, by Melvin D. Hugen. I was part of that project, as a professor in the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, and I have also drawn on the excellent work of other Project Africa colleagues where applicable in my writing of and teaching this manual also in Asia and elsewhere in the majority world, a term the outstanding Bible scholar, theologian, and Anglican pastor, John Stott, used to refer primarily to Africa, Asia, Latin America, parts of Eastern Europe, and the Middle East.

Preface: How to Use This Worship Course

This course was first designed to help church leaders in the majority world, such as Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and other countries. Nevertheless, since it is based on Bible texts and Biblical principles for worship planning, it also can be used effectively as a basic course in church worship in all parts of the world, as it has been in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Thus, the manual is also designed for continuing education for those who are present and prospective pastors and worship leaders in their churches and for an introductory course on worship in seminary. For large classes, activities can be done effectively in small groups of four.

Pastors and worship leaders will find much in this manual that they are not now doing, or not doing as effectively as they can do, to facilitate people's worship of our Triune God. They must avoid two serious temptations: (1) to try to implement all they read below at once and (2) to assume that if their congregation is small, they can never accomplish what they are reading. Be patient and rely on the leading of the Lord. In some cultural and political contexts, it may require time before some of what follows can be implemented. Congregations also need help to adopt new ideas, help for which is in Lessons Eight and Nine. Nevertheless, all congregations everywhere can use most of what is taught in this manual.

Although there are eleven lessons, the first seven are the core of the course, and this course can be adequately taught with just those seven lessons, not to minimize the importance of the other lessons. Since many churches are concerned about losing their young people and engaging all ages in their worship services, Lesson Seven on intergenerational worship will be particularly helpful, but the other lessons contain much information, the implementation of which will help engage children, teenagers, and young adults. Further, as changes in worship usually cause conflict in the church, mostly because the changes haven't been introduced well, Lessons Eight and Nine should also be taught at some point. As the need for occasional worship services, such as for ministry to those who are shut-in, weddings, and funerals, regularly occurs, Lesson Ten, offers much assistance. Lesson Eleven offers vital help for personal and family worship, since the family, especially those maturing in Christ, is the God-given basis of the church and society. Further, individuals and families are undergoing significant challenges in their lives that can most effectively be overcome by daily nurturing their relationship with our Triune God, especially in worshipping him.

The lessons after Lesson Six can be taught separately and on different occasions. The sessions after Lesson Six do not have to be taught in a particular order.

The lessons are designed to be taught in two-hour segments. However, as noted therein, it would be most helpful if Lessons Four and Eleven could be taught in at least a three-hour time frame. Lessons Three and Ten need at least four hours to be taught effectively as a whole. If that much time is not available, the teacher can select one of the other options that are mentioned at the beginning of those lessons. Lessons can be shortened as needed by selecting those parts the students most need to know *now* and by asking them to read the lessons outside of class, then discussing them in class and doing the activities that time permits.

Each lesson is based on Biblical passages related to worship and includes many discussion questions and exercises. Both the Bible texts and the activities are essential. While the Scriptures permit much freedom in our worship services, God has told us in his Word how he

wants to be worshiped and what he doesn't want his people to do in their worship. Thus, while we have much freedom in our worship, that freedom is not unlimited. Not everything people want to do in worship pleases God. We have freedom but within limits. The activities are designed to help people learn not only what the Bible teaches about specific elements of worship, but also the Biblical principles, which will enable them to make decisions about what to include and not include in worship, and in what order those aspects of worship may and sometimes should occur, that the Bible does not specifically address. For example, we have freedom to sing or not sing the very inspiring canticle, *Nunc Dimittis* (Latin for "Now dismiss" from Luke 2:29-32), and if used to place it either just after the celebration of the Lord's Supper or before the Benediction, as different churches do, and as will be explained in Lesson Two. Through both the reading of God's Word and in its discussion and application, we will help those who attend these sessions to learn most effectively, equipping them to accomplish worship renewal that will honor God and most meaningfully meet his people's deepest needs.

Within this manual you'll be invited to examine many Bible texts.¹ While focusing on the specific details, it also will be important to keep in mind the larger patterns in God's Word that pertain to worship. In other words, while looking at a specific tree don't lose sight of the forest. Don't miss the larger pattern or principles while focusing on a particular part of worship. For example, when reading Exodus 24:1-8, don't become sidetracked by spending time on precisely where the twelve stone pillars were located.

Instead consider the basic Biblical pattern of worship that occurs in this and many other texts in the Scriptures: God has called his people together and engages them/us in a dialogue. In so doing he gathers us to him; we hear his Word; we respond in faith together with a commitment to obey him; and he blesses us with good words (literally, benediction) as he sends us back into the world to serve him with the assurance he is with us and working through us, everywhere and always.

This manual on worship is not intended to promote one kind of worship tradition or style. The focus is to help church leaders in every culture to reflect on their calling to effectively lead God's people in their worship according to his Word and in ways that will please him.

In order to most effectively learn how to plan worship according to the Biblical principles that will be studied in this manual, it is important to experience them in the process of learning. In this workshop we'll plan and conduct a complete service of worship that will be part of Lesson Six. Several weeks before the workshop begins, as soon as you know who is coming, ask one of the attendees who can present a sermon well, to come prepared to do so at the worship session (during Lesson Six) in the workshop. Mention to all the others who register for the workshop that we'll be engaging in a worship service and invite any who play instruments to bring them.

At the end of Lesson One, assign the attendees to the following three work groups: Order of Service, Prayers, and Music. Give them their task description as indicated in that lesson, and ask them to work on their tasks either at the end of Lessons One through Five and/or during free time. Provide time in each session for the groups to confer as a whole group, so each functions in the light and as part of the whole, collaborating with each other as needed. For example, the

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotes in this worship manual are from the New International Version (NIV).

person who will be delivering the sermon needs to inform the three work groups as to the basic Bible texts on which the sermon will be based, and the subject focus of the sermon, so the others can make their decisions accordingly.

Each day of the workshop should begin with a brief time of worship. Ask those in charge of worship to use the principles they are studying to plan those worship sessions, thus providing models for all to observe and experience. Or, at least read a related passage of Scripture and offer prayer at the beginning of the lesson as indicated in the following lesson plans.

Throughout the process of teaching each lesson, be alert to the need for a break period. While the lessons contain many learning activities where the participants are actively engaged in the studies, the continued concentration and amount of information being processed may require a periodic need to stand and stretch. These are good times to sing a favorite psalm, hymn, or song especially when reconvening at the end of the break.

As an educator as well as a theologian, I have also utilized the finest of cross-cultural human learning research, teaching methods, and curriculum development, for example the emphasis on behavioral, especially Level III, objectives for each lesson. Teachers of these lessons should add any objectives that are needed in their own church settings. In other writings I provide further information on curriculum construction, lesson planning, and teaching methods, and these writings are on my above mentioned Websites. In particular, my essay, "[Curriculum Development and Lesson Planning: For Teachers and for Teachers of Teachers](#)," and my PowerPoint presentation on "[Christian Education Goals and Objectives with a Focus on Level III Objectives: How to Be Sure Your Students Are Understanding and Doing What You Have Taught Them](#)," are on the Christian Education page of my WordPress Website, as are other related and helpful resources on both Websites, all of which are free and without cost. Photos herein have been taken by me on location unless otherwise indicated.

Another distinctive feature of these educational programs is the use of Action Plans. The crucial element of each course, seminar, workshop, or other format in which this manual is used, is the formation, review, and critique by each participant of a plan of what he or she will do upon returning home with the material studied. Each participant is asked to make a commitment to his or her Action Plan at the end of the course. This final Action Plan is made after reviewing the Action Plans of each lesson and selecting those parts that he or she is able and willing to do. At the next workshop, the same participants gather to report on what they have accomplished. These follow-up lessons provide mutual encouragement, accountability, and further education.

This leader's guide may be used in a several-day workshop covering the entire course. Alternatively, pastors and theological professors may gather persons for training for a single lesson on a specific day of the week for several weeks. The workshop leader should feel free to use this manual as a resource for meeting the needs in the given circumstances of the participants and their congregations and other students as well. The manual can also be used as a reference book: Use the computer's "Find" feature to locate specific subjects of need or interest.

This curriculum resource, like the Bible on which it is based, is cross-cultural. The content is therefore applicable for teaching God's worship in all cultures throughout the world. The African churches, for which this manual was originally written, rightly insisted that they only wanted to be taught what is in the Bible about God's worship, which is exactly what I have tried

to do, while at the same time offering in Lesson Four a brief introduction to historic Christian systematic theology, which, rightly done, is all Bible-based (cf. Romans 8), indeed a systematic summary of the Bible's six main themes, and a very important guide in the planning of God's worship and in facilitating sanctification, which has always been part of Biblical worship. Such worship and sanctification is also necessary for the extension, nurture, and empowerment of God's kingdom in accord with Jesus' Great Commission to the church in Matthew 28:19-20.

This careful connecting with the culture is Biblical. For just a few examples, consider Pentecost, rightly understood, with the speaking in tongues of those from many other countries as the basis for translating God's Word into all languages. Notice that Matthew wrote his account of the Gospel of Jesus Christ specifically speaking in terms the Jews understood, valued, and used addressing their background, while Luke addressed his account of the Gospel to Greek-speaking Gentiles with specific application to their background. Also, all four of the writers of the Gospel, wrote in Greek, rather than in the Aramaic in which Jesus often preached (to those who spoke in Aramaic), talked with his disciples, called the dead to rise, and used on other occasions, because it was Greek, not Aramaic, that was the common language of the surrounding culture. We also note that the New Testament does not prescribe one correct way to worship. Yet, Paul does provide a principle: not just anything is permitted in worship, but what is done "in a fitting and orderly way." (1 Corinthians 14:40), which principle is employed throughout this manual.

Therefore, worship leaders teaching this course should feel free to include means of worship which, cautiously, carefully, and correctly adapted (i.e., made fit), are part of their cultural psyche, their human personality, *as long as those means of worship are permitted by the Bible and Biblical principles as well as other cautions*, for example, the African propensity for dancing, as seen in the video in Lesson Three, in response to life experiences, including in parts of the worship service; the use of contemporary, familiar, and pleasing musical instruments and melodies; and offering prayers of lament and supplication motivated by news reports. See the related parts of the manual where such applications are discussed as important means of carefully connecting with our cultural context, providing a catalyst for communicating with the community in which God has called us to be his witnesses and to evangelize for Christ.²

Further, such intentional connecting with the people in the culture we are trying to help transform for Christ involves not only inclusion but exclusion. Exclusion involves removing all unnecessary obstacles that would hinder reaching people in the secular community and facilitating their participation in the covenant community, e.g., using *without defining and explaining* technical and multisyllabic ecclesiastical and theological terms, some of which aren't fully understood by many Christians, such as apse, epiclesis, propitiation, and Parousia (*op cit.*). *At the same time*, church congregations and Christian educational institutions in all cultures in every country must be *very vigilant* to prevent pagan practices that are integral aspects of non-Christian religions and philosophies, including secular atheism, from being incorporated into God's worship. It is intrinsically impossible to bring in such practices and try to use them for God's worship. The infamous golden calf, which the people in utter blasphemy called their god "who brought [them out] of Egypt"! (Exodus 32:4), was still an idolatrous evil, directly counter

² For further information, see the well-constructed and helpful statement identifying, explaining, and promoting a wise and careful consideration of culture in worship planning that was produced by the Lutheran World Federation in 1996, called the [Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities](#).

to God's will that God totally rejected, even though Aaron tried to adapt it into Israel's worship by calling it "a festival to the LORD." (Exodus 32:5) Thus, vigilance and discernment are part of our spiritual warfare against Satan and his demonic followers. (Ephesians 4:11-16; 6:10-18)

As Christians who hold to the vertical criterion and divine authority of God and God's Word above all else, we must strongly resist and reject pressures from many who urge compromise and accommodation with the culture in what philosophically is called cultural relativism, the horizontal solely human norm-based authority concept that truth is relative to the context in which one is living. Compromise may sometimes be necessary in secular politics in matters that are not contrary to God's Word and will, but compromise is never to be done when doing so would be in disobedience to God. One mnemonic summary of this principle can be expressed this way:

Cultural Connection in accord with God's will is acceptable and useful;

Cultural Relativism contrary to God's will is abominable and destructive.

The main emphasis of the manual for this course is on the necessity to keep the focus in worship on Jesus Christ and his fulfillment of God's plan of redemption. (Cf. Luke 24:44-48) As worship leaders we need to facilitate in every culture the people's dialogue with our Triune God who has called us to meet with him in his worship. The purpose of this manual is to help us do so in ways that please, honor, and glorify him.

Using this Volume for Individual Learning about Christian Worship

As indicated above, this manual is a curriculum designed to inform church leaders and others about what the Bible teaches concerning God's will for his worship. However, since the manual contains much subject matter, including the main passages in God's Word pertaining to worship, it is also a valuable resource for individual reading to inform all people about Biblical worship.

Therefore, it can be used by anyone as a regular book to learn about worship. Individuals can simply skip over the instructions for the teacher and other curricular aspects of the manual and read the information, which is very valuable, and much of which is not being taught today, even in many seminaries and Bible colleges. The book is helpful for learning what is unknown, and for refreshing the memory of those who have long forgotten some of the information herein. Some of the activities can also be used well by individuals; for example, discussion questions can be used as guides for personal reflection. See also Chapter Eleven, which focuses on individual and family worship. As mentioned above for worship leaders, everyone can use this manual as a reference book by accessing the computer's "Find" feature and typing in any subject of need or interest.

In all cases, in classes or for personal use, this manual will enrich the understanding and experience of corporate, individual, and family worship. All three modes of worship are a great blessing for God's people that facilitates our offering to God the very meaningful worship only he so rightly and richly deserves and through which he will transform and sanctify our lives.

Biblical Foundations for What We Do in Corporate Worship

Needs of the Learners:

1. Felt Needs:

- a. The teacher should ask the students what they would like to learn in this course. Then be sure to include what they want to learn in the most applicable session.
- b. There are several ways to ask the students for this information, including verbal questions from the teacher in the first session of the course, asking the students to write anonymously on 3 x 5 cards given to each person, or dividing the class into small groups with the task of listing the desires of the students in that group.

Careful social science research reveals that the optimum number of people in a small group is four, perceived as being large enough for the likelihood that something significant will be said, and small enough to facilitate wanting to talk. That is the number where most people feel comfortable in speaking. For every number over four, more people feel less comfortable in sharing what they are thinking, and they are thus less inclined to participate in the group discussion.

The teacher should appoint one person in each small group to be the Recorder who lists the responses of the group members. Telling the groups to appoint their own Recorder wastes too much time and emotional energy for some. Use one of the enjoyable and informative ways of selecting the Recorder.

One way to appoint the Recorder is to say that the Recorder will be the group member whose birthday is closest to today, or the one who lives farthest away. After a specified amount of time (5-6 minutes), reconvene as a large group. The lists can be given to the teacher or, if enough time permits, the Recorders can each mention one need that was indicated in their group. After each Recorder has mentioned one need, the first Recorder can specify a second need that was mentioned in his or her group. The Recorders can then report one each in turn until all the needs of each group have been disclosed. Do not have the reporters state all the needs that were mentioned in their group all at once, so other reporters will have something to say that their group stated. This is a basic principle in the debriefing of all small group tasks.

Regarding the Recorders, be careful of the term you use for this responsibility. You will find it easier and quicker to select someone willing to undertake this task, if you do not ask him or her to be the leader. Many people don't want to be referred to as the leader, which is a responsibility involving certain abilities and gifts, even a calling, that they intuitively don't feel they have. However, these same people, even though they may not feel qualified to be a leader, and certainly not the Leader, even of a small group, often will agree to be the Recorder for the small group.

2. Unfelt Needs:

All the students need to learn the Biblical teaching on and how to develop and implement the following competencies:

- a. An understanding of, and ability to explain, the meaning of worship in the Bible.
- b. An understanding of, and ability to explain, the meaning of the major theme of covenant in the Bible and its relationship to historic Christian worship.
- c. An ability to plan a worship service in accord with God's will, as revealed in the Bible.
- d. Knowledge and awareness of distractions in worship and identification of ways to eliminate or minimize those in the worship setting that tend to draw the minds of God's people away from worshipping him and receiving his blessings.
- e. The ability to explain the concept of covenant renewal and its function in corporate worship, and to facilitate the congregation's doing so in worship.
- f. To begin a specific Action Plan to teach and put into practice what they are learning in the church congregation(s) they serve.

While our human condition has not changed and will not, and while the basic themes of the Bible will always remain the same, from generation to generation the needs of each age cohort change, as a given generation's needs will require an emphasis on certain Biblical doctrines that the prior and succeeding generations will not need to the same degree. Address these needs in Scripture readings, sermons, and music. One value of always composing new songs, while at the same time also using the best of the traditional hymns, is to facilitate worshipers meeting God, and receiving his help directly and through the assistance of fellow believers, with both new needs and those needs common to all people everywhere.

Goal: This lesson will help the participants learn the meaning of, and some aspects of what constitutes, public Christian worship according to the teaching of God's Word. They will begin a specific Action Plan to implement this teaching of the Bible in their own churches.

Objectives: In the field of education, objectives are specific stated intentions and planned outcomes written in terms of what students will be doing, which are designed to accomplish the goal of the course and its particular lessons. The most effective objectives are called behavioral or performance objectives. These are statements of how the students are expected to act in specific observable and measurable ways, which have been carefully written by the teacher (e.g., those below) and given to each class member by or at the first class session, the accomplishment of which will assure the teacher(s), and also the students themselves, that each student has developed the competencies that the lesson has been designed to help him or her learn and be able to do. The most effective of these objectives are called Level III objectives, and they contain three parts: a specific *measurable behavior*, *how well* that behavior is to be demonstrated, and the *conditions* under which the behavior is to be performed.

As will be emphasized throughout this manual, worship must be relevant and profound, must engage our feelings and affect, and must lead to action. (John 14:21) Therefore, the objectives are written for all three dimensions of human learning: cognitive (dealing with knowledge and understanding, e.g., objectives 1-7 below), affective (including feelings and attitudes, e.g., objective 8), and behavioral (including applicatory actions, e.g., objectives 9 and 10), all three of which are taught in the Bible. For further information, see the essays and PowerPoint programs I've written and posted on the [Christian education page](#) of my Website, *From Acorn to Oak 12* and on [How Can Churches Facilitate Education Leading to Maturity in Christ Worldwide?](#), my

academic Website. The minimum behavioral objectives for this lesson follow. Knowing their students' needs, each teacher should consider whether any other objectives should be added in this lesson and in all the other lessons of this course.

At the end of this lesson each participant will be able to do the following:

1. Identify and explain the three main uses of the word worship as used in the Bible.
2. Identify and explain the four main parts of corporate Christian worship.
3. Describe the dialogue that constitutes the essence of corporate Christian worship.
4. Explain why it is desirable to eliminate or minimize distractions that turn worshippers' attention away from the essential dialogue in worship, identify at least three common distractions, and cite at least one way to eliminate or minimize each.
5. Identify and explain why the concept of covenant renewal is central to Christian worship and how it occurs.
6. During this lesson, the teacher will observe only positive nonverbal feedback (e.g., enthusiasm, excitement, and joy) and hear no complaints when identifying and explaining the meaning and significance of the four main sections in the Biblical pattern of Christian public worship.
7. Participate with others in beginning to plan a public corporate Christian worship service and begin working on at least one aspect of that service in which he or she will lead when the service is held during Lesson Six.
8. Produce the first part of an Action Plan for his or her home church containing at least one idea from this lesson that he or she wants to implement and at least one SMART step to do so.
9. By the end of this course, at least 75% of the class will report to the teacher, verbally or in writing,
 - a. that they feel more confident in explaining to others the Biblical parts of Christian corporate worship, their meaning, and the logic of the liturgy,
 - b. and that they feel more motivated and able to implement needed changes in the worship practices of their congregation.
10. Within three months of the end of this course, at least 75% of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via text, via email or by regular mail) that they have implemented in their congregation's worship services at least three aspects of what they learned in this course.
11. Within three months of the end of this course, all the students will have begun to implement at least one part of their Action Plan, including at least one point in this lesson, within the congregation(s) they serve.

Materials Needed

1. A Bible for each participant; *The NIV Study Bible* is recommended but not required.
2. At least one 3 x 5 file card for each participant.
3. Digital projector **or** flipchart (and at least two markers) **or** overhead projector (and at least two water soluble markers) **or** chalkboard (and at least two pieces of chalk and an eraser). Since flipcharts are universally common, that word will be used throughout the manual. If you are using a digital projector, an overhead projector, a chalkboard, or more sophisticated technology, feel free to do so wherever you see the word flipchart. While this manual has been designed to be used especially in the majority world, but also elsewhere throughout the globe, those in more affluent countries should be careful of their assumptions of the settings in the majority world. It is true that in some places resources are very limited; however, in a

large number of others, sophisticated technology is available and used to a considerable degree. I have been heartened, and helped, by technologically knowledgeable, advanced and superior students and others in the educational institutions where I've taught. I have taught in many places where flipcharts and advanced projection technology have been used together in the same setting. Also, I have not lost sight of the fact that too many majority world people look to the West for a model (which I caution them to be careful of doing, including in a statement below), and they have adopted many of our Western counterproductive practices along with good ones. Therefore, Western people reading and using this manual should not draw the unwarranted conclusion that what they are reading is inappropriate for, or doesn't apply, in the other countries of the world. I have taught in many countries, enough to know that all I've written in this manual applies to all churches, but with special attention to those in the majority world.

4. If possible, one copy of Appendix B for each small group and one additional copy for each member of the class to take home.

Introduction

1. Introduce yourself to the group and ask the participants to do the same. As you introduce yourself, include the information below that you are asking the others to provide as they introduce themselves.
 - a. If the group is small enough, sit around a large table and ask them introduce themselves by saying their name, what they do, something about their family (if that can be done in a non-threatening way), and answer the question, "What do you enjoy most in worship?"
 - b. If the group is larger than 20 persons, ask them to divide into groups of four (one or two groups can have one more or less than four) and tell each other in the small groups the information in the above question.
2. Ask the question, "When Christians gather together to worship God, what should they do?" To answer such questions we need to turn to the Bible, God's Word. First, let's look at what the Bible means by worship.

What do we mean by "worship"?

1. Opening: Welcome; read a brief Bible passage related to today's lesson; offer prayer.
Ask: What is worship?
 - a. Let us look at the three main uses of the word worship in the Bible.¹
 - 1) Serving God in all of life

¹ In this section on the Biblical uses of the word, worship, I have drawn on the work of Professor John Witvliet, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A. *Introduction to Christian Worship: Supplemental Course Readings*, p. 1.

- a) Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)
- b) What does this text teach us? (We see in this text that our worship continues after the Benediction. Our worship is ascribed to all that we do as we live out our daily lives in relationship with and faithful obedience to, honoring, and glorifying God.) The focus of this course will be on our corporate worship but that it is always linked with our individual worship throughout each day of the coming week.

2) Ritual Event

- a) “[A]scribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness. Tremble before him, all the earth! The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let them say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns!’” (1 Chronicles 16:29-31)
- b) “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting.” (Acts 20:7-8)
- c) “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)
- d) “‘Sir,’” the woman said, ‘I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.’ Jesus declared, ‘Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.’” (John 4:19-24)
- e) What do we see in these texts? The references are to corporate worship that involves an expected pattern of acts in which the worshipers engage, which is called a liturgy. The word liturgy (derives from the Greek words: *leitourgia*, public service > Greek *laos*, people + Greek *-ourgia*, > *-ourgos*, working, > *ergon*, work) means the work, or service, of the people. All

congregations have a liturgy, whether or not it is written and distributed to the attendees. Sometimes the liturgy is too simple and incomplete, such as in many contemporary Evangelical megachurches, largely consisting of several songs followed by a lengthy sermon and a conclusion, often not even a benediction but rather a closing evangelistic appeal. It would be wise for such churches to insert, with appropriate explanation and transition statements, elements of the liturgy (such as the prayer of confession and assurance of pardon, general prayers, benediction) and on an incremental basis, so people can experience the accompanying blessings of doing so. See Lessons Eight and Nine for more help.

On the contrary, the historic Christian liturgy is a rich and spiritually satisfying and sanctifying order of service based on God's Word. There is a set of expectations that the community brings when they gather together for corporate worship. Human beings individually and corporately tend to function according to predictable patterns; we all have what law enforcement personnel call an MO, a method of operating. Not only individuals but groups which meet regularly, typically develop procedures which are comfortable and informative to them, and they like to repeat those activities which give them pleasure, joy, meaning, and purpose; there is typically a logic to the liturgy, whether it is a simple order, a highly structured order, or somewhere in between, what is often called semi-liturgical. The model in this manual is a type of what is called semi-liturgical worship. Some churches vary what they do in worship, but the variance occurs within an agreed upon form of operating, even though it doesn't have the prescriptions of highly liturgical churches.

Worship involves celebration of redemption through the life, suffering, death, and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and our own resurrection with him. Sunday is the day the early church gathered together to worship and celebrate Jesus' Resurrection. (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 3:20) Already in the New Testament, Sunday came to be called the Lord's Day. (Revelation 3:20) While every day belongs to the Lord, Sunday is special. This tradition of Sunday worship has resulted in the church referring to Easter Sunday as Resurrection Day and to all the Sundays before and after Easter as "little Easter." Also, especially when the global church worships on Sunday mornings, as traffic passes the churches' parking lots with all the vehicles, the church presents a witness for Jesus Christ, now and forever as risen and reigning and being honored and glorified.

Though buildings and their worship architecture are important and valuable and contribute to God's worship, and have from Bible times (e.g., 2 Chronicles 3-7; Matthew 24:1-2; Hebrews 9-10), the Biblical principles in this manual are applicable to all corporate worship everywhere. Throughout church history, the church, which by Biblical definition means people called out to serve God—and never in the Bible referring to a building—has from time to time had to worship in homes. House churches have existed in the Bible (e.g., Philemon 1:2); for the first three centuries A. D.; in countries where it has been, and still is, being heavily persecuted; and in extraordinary circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or more precisely, epidemic, limitations of public gatherings where

innovative congregations met in the front yard of members' homes, with masks and appropriate physical distancing while watching on a large TV, a live-stream of their church's worship service. Their warm and open invitation of neighbors has resulted in many significant outcomes, including establishing relationships, witnessing for Christ in the neighborhoods, and people who have been long separated from the church, due to past hurts, now being reconnected with the church.²

3) Praise or Homage

- a) "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care."
(Psalm 95:6-7)
 - b) What do you notice in this text? (Praising God in humble respect is an essential part of corporate worship, so much so that it is sometimes used as a synecdoche [a figure of speech where the part refers to the whole] for worship.)
- b. The focus of this workshop will be on the Christian worship of God in corporate public worship.
- c. What do you notice in all these texts about the subject of worship, that is, who receives worship?
- 1) In all these texts people are attributing supreme worth, value, honor, glory to God alone.
 - a) The English word, worship, comes from the Middle English word, worshiped, which means worthiness, repute, respect, reverence paid to a divine being which derived from the Old English word, "weorthscipe" with similar meanings. As Livingstone Buama has written, "The word worship refers to the art and the act of acknowledging worth and giving worth."³
 - b) Thus worship is attributing supreme worth to God, and in corporate worship God's people throughout Bible times have done so in specific ways that we'll study in this workshop. Throughout church history, most churches that base their authority on the Bible have continued these practices.
 - c) If time permits, discuss this question: What is the word for worship in your language or other languages with which you are familiar, and what does it mean?
 - 2) God, and he alone, is to be the recipient, of our worship.

² Chris Thompson and Andrew Bossardet, *RCA Today*, Winter 2021, pp. 22-25.

³ Livingstone Buama, "The Worship Experience of the Reformed Family in Ghana/West Africa" in *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, ed. Lukas Vischer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), p. 212.

Four Main Sections in the Biblical Pattern of Christian Worship

2. Divide the attendees into groups of four and assign each group one of the following texts. Ask each group to read its assigned passage and identify specifically what the people are doing in that passage. If you have five or fewer attendees do all the tasks as one group.

Exodus 4:29-31	Exodus 24:1-8	Joshua 24:1, 2, 24
Nehemiah 8:1-6	Psalms 105:1, 2, 45	Isaiah 6:1-8

3. Ask a representative of each small group to report to the group as a whole its findings. Ask each reporter to mention only one finding at a time. Then allow the next group's representative to report. As each is reporting list what is said on a digital projector, flipchart, newsprint, an overhead projector, a smartboard if available, or a chalkboard. (Since flipcharts are common, that word will be used throughout the manual. If you are using one of these other visual aids, do so wherever you see the word flipchart.) Use the document entitled, "Worship in the Bible," (Appendix A; cf. also Appendix E) to add any worship practices in these passages that the groups may miss. When all of the groups have reported, ask if they see any patterns in these texts. Point out that all the parts of worship occur within four main sections or categories, where the people

- gather to God (Be sure to point out that the gathering is in response to God's call to worship.)
- hear a proclamation of God's Word
- respond to God
- receive God's sending for service

Mention that worship involves a dialogue between God and his people.⁴ It is both vertical and horizontal; the vertical is central with horizontal implications (e.g., 2 Kings 17:34-39; Hebrews 10:25) that will be examined in this course.

Throughout this course, keep the divine-human dialogue in mind while examining the implications for planning worship in your congregation. The main parts of the worship service are expressions either from God or from his people in worship.

Ask questions such as the following:

- a. Is proper respect for God demonstrated in each part of the service? How do we show respect for God? Relatedly, how do we show respect for a fellow human being? (Do you feel respected when someone listens, really listens, intently, to you?)
 - 1) While worship is a dialogue between God and his people, we always need to keep clearly in mind that the two parties are not equal. God is most holy, and worship

⁴ See, e.g., John Witvliet in *The Worship Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: CRC Publications, 2004), p. 16.

leaders' recitation of his Word, as well as the worshipers' responses, should never be done perfunctorily, cavalierly, or disrespectfully.

2) Read Ecclesiastes 5:1, "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong."

a- God is calling us to come to him and to listen to his Word. The text means to not just hear with his Word coming in one ear and going out the other. Throughout the Bible, God reveals his will that his people worship him sincerely, not superficially (5:1); meaningfully, not just babbling (Matthew 6:7); and in spirit and in truth (John 4:19-24); responding in accord with his Word.

b- The Hebrew word, שָׁמַע (*shāma* ') means hear, listen, and typically obey (e.g., Exodus 24:7; 1 Samuel 15:22; Ecclesiastes 5:1; Jeremiah 35:13-14). In Ecclesiastes 5:1, *shāma* ' means listen in the sense of obeying. We who have come to worship, have come to hear, to really hear, listening with a commitment to respond in obedience to God's Word.

b. Does this element I'm planning to include follow meaningfully in the dialogue with God in this service?

c. Have I included time for the worshipers to be silent before God? (Deuteronomy 27:9; Psalm 62:5 [NASB, NRSV]; Habakkuk 2:20)

d. Take three minutes and talk with the person sitting next to you about this question: What can worship leaders do to help people enter God's sanctuary with the awareness that they are entering the presence of God who is Most Holy as well as all loving and prepare themselves to carefully listen to and obey his Word?

Have I taught this concept to the congregation, and do I regularly reinforce it, e.g., through reminders in the weekly bulletin, articles in the church newsletter, transitional statements in the worship service, prelude music that is conducive to meditation, inclusion of periods of silence in prayer for the people to pray for individual matters pertaining to their lives specifically? (See Lesson Five on prayer.) ***How else can we help people be more conscious of their entering the presence of God who is most holy and how they should act?*** Since many people find it difficult to pray spontaneously, consider having copies of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), or of a similar book your denomination approves, or excerpts on the many subjects of importance in people's daily lives in the pews to help them pray.

e. Have I emphasized the presence of God, who is most holy as well as being all love, when people enter his sanctuary?

1) In the first part of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches his followers to pray "hallowed be your name." (Matthew 6:9) Is our Lord using "hallowed" as an appellation or a petition? It is not the former, a name for or a description of God; if so Jesus would have said, "hallowed is your name." Instead, Christ said, "hallowed **be** your name,"

and urged his followers to petition for God’s help in enabling them to act in such ways to witness to God’s holiness and glorify him in so doing.

- 2) As people enter the sanctuary with this understanding, that they have come to hear God speak to them and have the opportunity to communicate with him, and that prior to the Call to Worship they should be silent and receptive to God, waiting upon the Lord, rather than talking with their neighbors at this time, they will enter the worship dialogue in a different frame of mind; the whole worship service will be transformed in their understanding. As they begin the service with reverent silence before him, they will be showing respect to and beginning to honor God. By employing these and other practices included in this manual, no longer will people leave saying, “I didn’t get anything out of this service;” “I wasn’t fed;” or “I was bored.”
- 3) Read these three texts:
 - a) “Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:30)
 - b) “Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the LORD. (Leviticus 26:2)
 - 1- The Hebrew verb translated “have reverence for” is *tîra’û*, which literally means “you will fear.” This fear is a healthy respect in awe of God rather than an abject dread of him. Though God has revealed that the core of his being is love (1 John 4:8), and he discloses that love on every page of the Bible, nevertheless he is also holy, holy, holy, that is separate, pure, and uncommon. He does not permit evil in his presence, and he will judge it. This awareness should motivate great reverence and respect for God and his sanctuary, and a healthy fear of the consequences of disobeying God helps activate that reverence in his sanctuary and in his people’s daily walk with him in his service.⁵
 - 2- We need to be careful in teaching this concept. Many people have a distorted view of God; we need to help them bring their understanding of God closer to that which he has revealed in his Word and not add to their confusion. Consider the context in which you are teaching. Specifically, what is the background of your class concerning their understanding of who God is, what he is like, and what he is doing?
 - a- Are they people, usually older and from a conservative church background, who remember being taught in childhood that God is a strict judge who easily sends people to hell?
 - b- Or, are they people who have grown up with the idea, a reaction to the older teaching, that God is their best friend and that he just sits back in his rocker, smiles at everything, and “wouldn’t hurt a flea?”

⁵ *Complete Biblical Library Hebrew-English Dictionary* – Heth-Yodh.

- c- Or, are they somewhere in between these two views?
- d- If you have people in the first group in your class, be sensitive that their background and the previous learning they've developed from it may mentally shape what you are saying to understand something you are not intending to say. Take time to explain and discuss this important Biblical theme of fearing God. Help people to mentally process this concept correctly.

For more information on what it means to fear God, see the essay, "[Who is God, and what is he like? Part 25: What is the fear of God?](#)" It is on the Christian Theology page of my Website, From Acorn to Oak 12, at www.fromacorntooak12.com or www.edwardseely.com. See also "[Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God's Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity,](#)" an accompanying PowerPoint program, which is also on the Christian Theology page. Using the Search or Find bar, type in the term, fear of God. These and all other resources on that Website are free and offered with permission to be used for Christian ministries throughout the world.

- c) "Your testimonies are fully confirmed; Holiness befits Your house, O LORD, forevermore." (Psalm 93:5 (NASB))
- d) DISCUSS:
 - 1- What is the significance of Leviticus 19:30 being repeated already again in Leviticus 26:2? Is God telling us that this behavior in his sanctuary is very important to him?
 - 2- What would your/our sanctuary and worship service look like if people "have reverence for" God's sanctuary?
 - 3- How do we communicate this aspect of God's will to his people, in particular to your/our congregation?

Dealing with Distractions

- 4. We've just identified the essential dialogue that occurs in corporate worship between God and his people. In all conversations, and especially in worship, distractions take people's attention away from this dialogue. It is vital, especially in worship, to help people concentrate on what God is saying to them and to help them respond appropriately. Try discussing the following questions together in the group as a whole. If it becomes difficult to obtain discussion, ask them to return to their small groups to respond to the questions, then reconvene in the large group and process the responses as above.
 - a. How important is it to minimize and, where possible, to remove distractions?

- 1) How do you feel when you are trying to have a conversation with someone, and he or she is looking all around at others, or surfing the Web, or texting on a smart phone, while you are talking with him or her? Do you feel honored? Respected? How do you think God feels when we do that in worship services when he is communicating with us? Clearly, distractions do not honor God.
 - 2) People do come to worship with a myriad of concerns and joys that make it difficult enough to concentrate on their conversation with God. We should do all we can to avoid, reduce, or eliminate external factors that interfere with that holy conversation.
- b. What distractions can you identify that interfere with our communication with God in public worship that you've observed in your and in other church congregations? As participants cite distractions, list them on the flipchart. If they are not mentioned, or in the unlikely circumstance that no one mentions anything, include the following:
- 1) Announcements, when not made after the Sending/Benediction, e.g., during the Offering or even prior to the worship service. Pastors and other worship leaders are not to function as masters of ceremonies but as facilitators of the dialogue between God and his people. Announcements distract worshipers from their vital conversation with God; *they have come primarily with a longingness to meet with God*. Even announcements before the worship service begins, via presentation technologies, such as PowerPoint, or via a person standing in front of the congregation, interfere with the people's preparation for hearing God.
- Questions:
- a) What function does silence have in your tradition, and in your church in particular, in which people, after they have arrived, quietly sit in contemplation of, and meditation on, what they have come to do, in which they orient their minds and hearts to God and their meeting with him, transitioning from the busyness, concerns, pressure, and stress of their daily lives, readying themselves to eagerly hear what God has to say and to communicate with him?
 - b) What can you do to facilitate this important opportunity prior to worship? (Some congregations include a statement, either in the bulletin or on the projection screen, asking those who arrive early to take such time in silence. Such a statement authorizes and validates the silence, helps people understand "why 'nothing' is happening!" and puts them at ease. The silence itself will be a reminder of what is expected prior to the service.)
- 2) Presentational technologies, when they are poorly done and draw the people's attention away from what God is saying, instead of facilitating their attention to and understanding of what God is saying. Used well, these technologies are helpful (e.g., during a sermon highlighting specific words in the Bible passage that is being emphasized; projecting a limited number of pictures of carefully selected, clear, and pertinent maps; showing photos of archaeological discoveries of places referred to in the Biblical text for the day; showing pictures of the lifeless idols people in Bible

times actually worshiped, dehumanizing themselves and committing apostasy and abomination in God's sight in the process). Nevertheless, inadequately prepared presentations (e.g., misspellings, deficient quality, too loud, or hard to hear) or misused (e.g., primarily designed to entertain, or show how "relevant" the pastor is, rather than to illustrate what God's Word is saying), visual presentations interfere with the dialogue God has called his people together to have with him, just like when we are trying to communicate with someone who is paying more attention to his or her cell phone. Worship planners should constantly ask these questions when considering using such technologies: Honestly, what, really, is the purpose I'm trying to accomplish? Will doing this help the people to further understand what God is saying to us in his Word in this service?

- 3) Clapping, which is ambiguous, raises the question, "For what or for whom is this clapping a response? What are we doing?" Even that question is a distraction. If the clapping is for something said or done that truly praises and honors God and is addressed to him, that is legitimate, and Biblical, *when it is clear to everyone that God is the recipient.* (Psalm 47:1) Applause at other times, e.g., following a stirring multimedia or musical presentation, raises questions, "For whom is the clapping intended? The technician who designed the program? The worship leader who found and made arrangements for its use in this worship service? Others? Or is the clapping for God?" Obviously, a large percentage of musicians are aware the applause is for them; this is clearly observed when they take a bow and/or say, "Thank you" and when the pastor or worship leader claps and points to the musicians. Clapping is also progressive, and it's not appreciated by all, including many presenters, especially those who are not applauded. Clapping became so frequent in one congregation that a man with only slight hyperbole complained to me as he left the sanctuary, "When will all this clapping stop?! Today we clapped for everything except the Apostles' Creed!" A simple announcement in the church bulletin for the next few weeks corrected the problem. If clapping is for any other than God, how is it fitting for his worship? God is ignored too much during the week as it is; we cannot ignore him on the Lord's Day in his own house, even in his own sanctuary! Humans facilitate God's affirmation in his worship; we should not receive approbation that God deserves.
- 4) Use of electronic devices, e.g., cell phones, computers, touch pads, not only distracts the user but results in diminished engagement in, enjoyment of, and respect for God and his worship. The use of such devices, when not used for the worship service itself (e.g., locating the Bible passages upon which the service is based), takes the user away from his or her engagement in the dialogue with God, who has called him or her to meet with and relate to Him.

Research into such activity while watching a TV program yields information that indicates why dissatisfaction results from such distractions. Notice the implications for church worship.

More than half of television viewers between 18 and 24 years old engage in social media on a second screen while watching, but a new

UConn study says this engagement does not increase enjoyment of a show.

The UConn Department of Communication found in its study that tweeting reduces viewers' ability to immerse themselves into the TV narrative.

'Social media metrics are an important and widely used measure of user engagement, (but) engagement may not necessarily mean enjoyment,' Saraswathi Bellur, a UConn assistant professor of communication who co-authored the study, said....

A survey...showed that the participants [in the study] who did not tweet were more likely to be 'transported' into the show and feel 'more intensified emotions'.... Not focusing entirely on the narrative of the show is likely what reduces enjoyment, said Xiaowen Xu, a UConn doctoral student who coauthored the study.

'You're asking people to do a different thing when they could have involved themselves more with the story,' she said. 'It kind of takes away part of their cognitive ability to get immersed.'⁶

And obviously their emotive ability as well. The connection with corporate worship is inescapable. It also distracts those sitting nearby. Notice the implications and applications of this study for church worship and also for education classes and other church programs.

Very importantly, cognitive attention and reflection are significantly diminished and distract us from the main One talking with us, God! A Virginia Tech study examined activities related to making a cell phone call while driving—"reaching for a phone, looking up a contact and dialing the number"—increase the risk of a crash by three times....Notable is the finding that text-messaging doubled the risk of a crash."⁷

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) of the United States Department of Transportation reports that distracted driving is deadly. From 2012—2019, over 26,000 people died in crashes involving distracted drivers; the NHTSA reports on its Website that "Texting, which includes messaging, is considered the most dangerous type of distracted driving because it combines visual, manual and cognitive distraction."⁸ Note well that all three of these types of distractions, visual, manual, and cognitive, are

⁶ Tess Vrbin, "Study finds it's harder to enjoy a show while tweeting about it," *Hartford Courant*, republished in the *Loveland Reporter-Herald*, July 10, 2019, p. 6B.

⁷ "Handline phone creates greatest driving risk," *Reporter-Herald* editorial, *Reporter-Herald*, March 16, 2014, p. 4A.

⁸ "U Drive. U Text. U Pay." <https://www.nhtsa.gov/campaign/distracted-driving> (Accessed 7/3/2021)

dimensions of human functioning which are essential parts of corporate Christian worship services.

Consider also that the use of digital devices is not allowed in a court of law. The attention of all in attendance is required. How can any less be expected in our worship of God?!

Some rhetorical questions for reflection: When we turn our attention away from God, how do you think he feels, when he has called us together to hear what he has to say and to respond to him, to communicate with him in a brief dialogue for the purpose of enriching and equipping our lives to effectively serve him in the accomplishment of his purposes for us and to bless us in many other ways? How would, or do, you feel when you are talking with someone and he or she takes a phone call or responds to a text during your conversation? What message is being communicated by this person as to who is more important, unless he or she apologizes and asks to be excused for taking an exceptional emergency call, e.g., from a spouse or child?

➤ **DISCUSS:** How can we communicate this message to the congregation assembled for God's worship? How can we most effectively urge people to not use their cell phones during their worship of God who, while being all-loving is also Most Holy, indeed, holy, holy, holy?!

- 5) Passing and signing an attendance registry during the worship service
- 6) Late-comers' seating
- 7) Talking
- 8) Continuous coughing and/or sneezing, especially when unmuffled
- 9) Immodest dressing
 - a) Dress that draws attention to the soloist, instrumentalist(s), other worshipers, and away from God, e.g., the following:
 - 1- Flashy and/or expensive hair styles, clothing, jewelry, ties, shoes, and glasses. (1 Timothy 2:9-10. In first century A.D. Ephesus, women who wore braided hair indicated that they had wealth. In referring to braided hair, Paul was stating that they should not flaunt their socioeconomic status in God's worship.)
 - 2- Revealing clothes that do not sufficiently cover the body or that are tightly form fitting are not only immodest but provocative. This is especially important to know for female soloists, instrumentalists, and other worshipers due to the biological differences between the way men and women are sensually stimulated. Speaking for other men, one mentioned after a worship service in which the soloist sang from the pulpit with a plunging V-neck, "After she started and leaned over, I didn't hear a word she sang!" This is one

main reason why Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, especially in Europe and in the Middle East, have historically required women to cover the upper part of their bodies, including their arms, in order to even enter the church building. Length of skirts should also be governed by the modesty principle. This is also one aspect of the rationale for why choirs have traditionally used robes, and many still do, but now especially with the development of many praise teams that do not dress with robes, this matter has become an issue. However, even robed women clergy who are not wearing slacks need to be careful how they sit particularly in a raised chancel chair.

- Honestly ask yourself this question: To whom do I really want the attention of the people to be directed? To me? Or to God? Then pray, asking the Lord's guidance in your decision, and dress accordingly.
- b) Especially, but not only, in the current Western milieu, many women do not understand these psychobiological differences and even mistake the motives of those who try to explain them.⁹ Thanks be to God, many other women do understand the male-female differences pertaining to this matter, and they dress accordingly, especially, I observe, in non-Western cultures. The issue in the church, is not in any way about males trying to control or have power over women or tell them what they can and cannot wear. That is how the issue is framed by many in society. It is not helpful, and is in fact counterproductive, insensitive, and unloving, when women in reaction to this reality respond with pejorative comments such as, "That's your problem;" "Just get over it;" "It's my body, and I'll do what I want;" "Don't lay a guilt trip on us;" "Don't try to control us;" and "We'll wear what we want to wear."

We need to remember that God created men and women with specific genetic differences, commonly referred to colloquially as "wiring them differently." Healthy men retain the XY chromosome with which they have been created, and the hormones it produces, throughout their entire lives. These hormones significantly shape their feelings, perspective, motivations, and behavior. In addition, the struggle Christian men have to avoid impure thoughts is affected by original sin and the level of sanctification in which each individual is functioning.

In God's Kingdom, the Biblical term for the rule of God in human hearts and minds, these matters pertaining to dress are more about love for others, including caring for and helping the men whose brains process input from the environment differently from women. When young and older women dress modestly, they help men and also help themselves; in modest dress, they honor God and receive the proper respect that is due them in their creation by God.

⁹ Sound science has revealed over [3,000 genetic differences between males and females at the cellular level](#), and at least [6,500 differences between the two sexes](#). In the words of one female physician, "Women are not little men."

It is not about male lust; in fact, it is about men who are struggling *not* to lust, and it is not just a matter of “growing up” and thinking more maturely; again, that XY chromosome and original sin affect males throughout their lives here on earth. Most all regenerated males, especially those progressing in sanctification, are trying to honor God with their thoughts, and females are especially able to help them.

Providentially, many women do clearly understand this situation, and women managers have had to establish professional dress codes in their business and address violations with those they supervise. Some schools have dress codes and many others are considering going back to them. One charter school teacher wrote that her school “understands we have a very limited time with our students. It’s why we have a dress code to help free students from classroom distraction.”¹⁰ Similarly, *wise worship leaders have a carefully worded document prepared for soloists, cantors, choirs, praise teams, and others who appear in front of the congregation that identifies proper attire for those who lead in worship, male and female.* When specific persons have to be engaged with further information, it is more easily communicated and works well when a woman who understands talks with female musicians, and males with males.

Here is how one church addresses the matter of appropriate attire in God’s sanctuary. They have placed this sign outside the main entrance to the church building:



Male pastors have lamented the challenge of standing over and administering the elements of the Lord’s Supper to immodestly dressed women kneeling at the Communion rail at the entrance to the chancel, the holiest part of the sanctuary, and looking down at much more than they want to see. The same occurs at weddings, when in the liturgy the couple is asked to kneel.

¹⁰ Cathy Ballenski, “Loveland Classical’s focus on students, education get results,” *Reporter-Herald*, November 22, 2021.

The question arises, “What is the motivation for dressing in such a way that reveals parts of their body that only their husband should see?” A woman told me that women dress more for other women than for men. A response could be that if they were seen only by other women, that may or may not be a problem, depending on the motivation.

However, if the motivation is to draw attention to herself, especially by men, then she needs further information and to do a self-examination. That further information should include (1) she will gain attention from men, but more attention from those whose attention she doesn’t want; the decent men who are trying to obey the Lord, will turn away from her and not look at her to avoid temptation that would not occur if she were properly dressed. (2) Does she care with Christlike love about the struggle many men have? (3) In worship, that attention distracts men, and ostensibly, other women from the worship service.

One other matter needs to be mentioned: Where are the men in her life exercising the leadership in the home that the Lord has given them? If she is married, her husband should speak to her. If she is unmarried, her father should have long ago informed her of this important aspect of male psychobiology.

- c) In one segment of his radio program, “Light of the East,” Father Thomas J. Loya, pastor of Annunciation of the Mother of God Byzantine Catholic Parish in Homer Glen, IL, pastorally and sensitively elucidates the essential psychological, physiological, theological, and liturgical aspects of this important matter.¹¹ Pertaining to the theology of the human body, dress, and the liturgy, Fr. Loya explains exceptionally well that the language of our bodies communicates a message about ourselves, about our Christian faith, and about God. Historically the liturgy involves a lot about covering up, e.g., the coverings of the clergy and choir vestments and the chalice and the blessed bread of the Eucharist, the elements of Holy Communion that remain covered until that time in the liturgy when worshipers partake of the Lord’s Supper. This type of covering up, and with beautiful dress, points to the royal dimension of the kingdom of God in the church, and we are giving God our finest, representing ourselves in the finest way; we are trying in this manner to glorify God and in particular the Lord Jesus Christ, the King.

Thus, in the church that which is special, and in particular that which is holy (i.e., separated to and for God), is covered. Each is covered or veiled in the church, until the proper time when it is uncovered, revealed, in those certain times in special circumstances for certain eyes and for the holiest of purposes.

Fr. Loya asks ladies, and parents of girls, to compare their own bodies to these aspects of the liturgy. As we cover elements of the liturgy because they are

¹¹ Fr. Thomas J. Loya, “The Light of the East: ‘LIGHTEAST 877E Wow! Is it Hot Here!’” Catholic Television and Radio Network, EWTN, aired July 11, 2021. A podcast of this program can be listened to and downloaded at <http://byzantinecatholic.com/podcast/index.php>. (Accessed 7/12/21)

special, so too should we cover our bodies that have been made by God to be special and, indeed, are holy to Him. The human, and in particular the female, body is very special.

Fr. Loya adds that God has created women to be attractive, and they are especially so to men. In particular for women, this covering is not done to conceal their femininity, not head-to-toe, but the female body is to be cared for, to be covered, so that it is always looked at in a way that is commensurate with its dignity, honor, and holiness. The female body is modestly covered in worship because it is special; it is uncovered at certain times for certain eyes in certain occasions, i.e., for her husband who has promised himself to her in marriage. We don't present and accentuate our bodies, because that would not be in accord with the dignity of the human, especially female, body.

I remember well an older woman Sunday School teacher who taught a girls' class for many decades in one of the churches my family and I served. She emphasized to all of her classes for those many years, "Do not uncover parts of your body that only your husband should see." This teacher modeled in her own dress what she said in her words. I'm grateful my wonderful wife and partner in life and ministry also always did so as well throughout her whole life here on earth.

Fr. Loya adds that most men do not want to lust, to which I would add especially men who are regenerated (born again) by the Holy Spirit and are maturing in the sanctification process, but it is an act of Christlike love to help men who really struggle hard due to original sin to not lust while viewing the beauty of the female body, especially parts of it that are uncovered, pointed to, and emphasized by certain dress styles. The Byzantine Eastern Rite Catholic priest in this podcast rightly emphasizes that "Modesty is simply asking women to assist men in their duty to perceive and relate to women according to God's design. Modesty in no way shifts the responsibility entirely on to the woman. It is not an objectification, subjugation, or sexualization of women. Nor is it gender discrimination or prudishness. Modesty reveals a woman's self-possession; her intelligent awareness of inherent dignity of her femininity, but also her mature understanding of the fallen side of both masculinity and femininity."

- d) Thus, a very important dimension of the principle of modesty and its application in worship is dress when coming before God, who is most holy, in his sanctuary (which by definition is holy). In 1 Timothy 2:9, Paul intends, urges, that women in worship dress with modesty (*αἰδοῦς* [*aidous*], modest, reverence, decency) and propriety (*σωφροσύνης* [*sōphrosunēs*], discretion, moderation, self-control), not with adornments, including expensive clothes.

A significant application of this principle in worship, especially in the West, is with the popular mode of dress among women today to wear "distressed clothes," in particular jeans, that have been machine torn and damaged. These jeans look exactly like ones I had as a child that my mother threw into the garbage. Now such clothes have become a very popular fad and are highly valued, even costing many hundreds of dollars; those surely are "expensive clothes."

The *motivation and the message* such dress sends must be considered by the one who wears the clothing chosen. Such consideration is always necessary for those who bear the image of God and witness not only verbally but nonverbally with what we say and how we dress, but it is especially so in God's worship. What does our manner of dress say about our respect for him, including for his Word and his will?

We are to do our best for him and "make it our goal to please him." (2 Corinthians 5:9). In decision-making pertaining to how we dress to come into the presence of God, recognizing we are sending a message with what we wear, we need to honestly ask, "Who am I most trying to please? Am I trying most to please God, or to please, be recognized by, and to fit in with certain people?" If the answer to that question we truly sense is that we are trying to be popular and liked by others, then we need to learn and remember Jesus' strong warning in Luke 6:26, "Woe to you when all men [generic, including women] speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets."

We should also ask ourselves, "Is God pleased with these clothes I'm planning to wear, and with my motivation for doing so, as I present myself before him in his worship? Is the best I have to bring to meet with him in his sanctuary? Why would I not wear these clothes when appearing before the most respectable human beings, who are nowhere near as respectable as God, such as before the judge in a courtroom (or even be allowed in the courtroom dressed this way)? How can I do less for God?!"

If one is poor, and has no better clothes, that is a whole other matter. A poor person would just wear the best he or she has and with the right heart and frame of mind be welcome in God's sanctuary. God knows what we have, and we know what would please him for us to wear in his presence...if we think about it and pray about it.

For more on this subject, see Appendix F, "Principles for Determining What Is Beautiful in and for God's Worship." See also the article, "[Is It Immodest to Wear Deliberately Ripped Clothes?](#)" by John Horvat II.

- e) Attire also communicates respect, and dress sends a message throughout society. Defense attorneys require their clients to dress well in court. In his weekly column in a local daily newspaper, funeral director Dave Viegut wrote, "While there has been a notable shift in everyday dress from more formal to casual wear, it should be noted that a funeral requires respect to be paid to the deceased by wearing appropriate attire that properly suits the occasion. Funeral attendees are highly encouraged to wear clothing that reflects the high regard in which they held the person.... As is the case with other important events such as weddings and graduations, a funeral marks a momentous time in a person's life...it is important to dress in a manner that befits the occasion.... It is also not appropriate to show too much skin."¹² While funeral services are a different type

¹² Dave Viegut, "Thoughts to Consider: Respectful Attire," *Reporter-Herald*, March 20, 2019, p. 11A.

of worship service (see Lesson Ten), they still are occasions where God's people come into His presence to worship Him, and they should dress appropriately, contemporary community customs to the contrary notwithstanding. (Cf. Romans 12:2) In fact, as Viegut indicates, even in the secular community, it is customary to dress respectfully on special occasions. Nothing is more special than coming into the presence of and worshiping the Triune God, the creator, owner, and Lord of the cosmos! Let us never forget in Whose presence we are in worship.

- **DISCUSS:** How should pastors and worship leaders address the importance of dress? Include any of the following not mentioned.
- 1- It would be good at this time to remind this person that the word sanctuary, wherein our worship takes place, comes from the root word *sanctus*, the Latin translation of the Biblical Greek word, ἅγιος (*hagios*), which means holy, i.e., set apart for and to God, who is most holy, into whose presence we are entering at His calling to commune with Him. Thus, our worship is occurring in a special place that has been dedicated to be a worship space holy to God; we need to act accordingly.
 - 2- Furthermore, the church has been called to be holy to God in all it does. (Cf., e.g., Isaiah 4:3; 56:7; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 2:9) This doctrine is what Biblical scholars call a major motif, a concept that occurs throughout the Bible, and is essential to the accomplishment of God's redemptive purposes. Periodically, we need to teach this concept to the whole church, as a reminder of those who've heard before, and as instruction to newcomers, as to how that awareness and understanding guides us as to what we do and do not do in our daily lives in general, and in that holy place in particular.
 - 3- An illustration: With other staff members and the board of elders, they should first develop a policy on dress in worship and then prepare a statement in writing that is given to all who participate in leading church worship that includes the above information pertaining to attire. The statement should be presented during a meeting of all involved, and the matter should be explained and discussed to any extent necessary. If any leader shows up dressed inappropriately for leading in any way in a worship service, he or she should not be permitted to participate. This procedure for dealing with a violation of the church dress policy should also be explained ahead of time.

This procedure was followed successfully at a church my family and I served for many years. If in your church you found it necessary to allow a leader to participate, even though he or she was inappropriately dressed, he or she should be informed, speaking the truth in love, that if he or she does so again, the person will not be asked to participate in the future in the leading of God's worship in your sanctuary.

This procedure is part of what historically has been called church discipline. At least since the latter part of the 20th century, the church has become lax in its practice of church discipline; it needs to correct that oversight soon in order to serve God most effectively, including in his worship.

- 10) Worshipers waiting in line for, or returning from, receiving the elements of the Lord's Supper in the front of the sanctuary; some even wave and/or talk to other worshipers
- 11) Passing the peace or other greetings and hand-shaking, *when not done well*,¹³ i.e., without explaining the meaning of the rite, its history, or its place in the liturgy. Passing the peace is an ancient part of the Christian worship service, done as a means of emphasizing God's will for peace in the church and church unity. For example, it is a way of obeying Jesus teaching, "...if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23-24). For God's concern about church unity, see also Mark 12:30-31; John 17; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

Therefore, the main and proper liturgical place for Passing the Peace has been prior to the Offering, and also before the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, even being seen in some communions, e.g., the Roman Catholic Church, as a prerequisite for receiving the elements of the sacrament. The pastor says words such as, "The peace of Christ be with you," to which the people respond, "And also with you." These words the pastor speaks from the chancel, signify that they come from the Triune God, and Christ in particular, and that the minister is passing on to the people the peace he or she has received from God. The chancel architecturally represents the most holy place, the location of the three means of grace from God: the pulpit (the Word), Lord's table, and the baptismal font.

¹³ When placing people in a forced-response situation, we must be especially careful. Some leader-led instructions can be more than distracting by those with special concerns and who are feeling fragile and vulnerable. People appear in our worship services who have been abused and recoil when they perceive their personal space as being violated by hand-shaking, hugging, and the laying on of hands (that some worship leaders have the whole congregation do, in which even nonbelievers participate, contrary to Scripture). Some women who have been abused by men and/or are in recovery from a troubled marriage, have grave trust issues with men, and don't want to be touched by them; these women have come to commune with God and want (even need for a while) to be given the freedom to interact with others to the degree they feel comfortable. If they (and many men also) are forced to do something with which they feel uncomfortable, the likelihood is high that their worship will be hindered and that they will not return. Many people don't want to shake hands, especially during cold and flu season, and now with COVID-19 and its mutations that appear to be continuing. These are some of the reasons for suggesting people pass the peace of Christ, at least by simply greeting one another, at the end of the service as they are leaving the sanctuary and can participate as they desire. In such matters worship leaders should always examine their own motivation for wanting to force people to do something; they should ask themselves, "Why do I want to require people to do this...? What is the real reason I want them to...?" If the answer in all honesty is because other churches are doing it, or it is something that I keep reading in the literature, or I'm hearing it at leadership seminars, or it will show my peers I'm on the cutting edge and "with it," or it seems like a way to make people feel "warm fuzzies," and no basis in the Bible or historic Christian theology exists to support doing so in worship, then it would be good to seriously consider leaving it out of the worship service, doing it after the Sending/Benediction, doing it in some other context in the life and work of the church, or not doing it at all.

The pastor should then say words to this effect: “Now let us pass this peace from Christ to one another with a warm greeting.” Periodically, that pastor or worship leader should remind the congregation to use proper decorum, e.g., to keep it “short, simple, and sweet” and to respect people’s comfort levels, especially those one does not know or know well, thus authorizing people refraining from physical contact. (See the footnote.) From time to time he or she should offer suggestions, such as, “The peace of Christ be with you.” Or, simply, “Shalom” (the Hebrew Old Testament word for peace). Or even, “So good to see you again!” In different cultures throughout the global church, God’s people want to offer their verbal greetings together with a handshake (or in epidemic conditions an elbow or fist bump¹⁴), a hug, or even a holy kiss (typically on the cheek or hand). Throughout history these expressions have been done with much joy by many, but not by all; therefore, teach the congregation the caveats in this section in order to be sensitive to the needs of others, and in so doing giving them peace in other ways as well.

We should keep in mind that the Passing of the Peace should be done in the context of our main dialogue with God; we should not become distracted by and carried away with laughter and conversations about sports, new purchases, trips, or other such diversions. Such occurrences occasionally take place, so the pastor needs to monitor carefully the conversations, and after roughly half a minute,¹⁵ lead the congregation to the next part of the liturgy.

12) Prayer circles

- a) Some congregations have tried substituting prayer circles for a leader-led time of general prayer. In so doing the worshipers divide into small groups of two to four or more and pray by themselves instead of praying as a whole assembly led by the pastor or a liturgist. The hope is to engage worshipers more fully in the time of prayer and to provide the opportunity for prayers to be offered that the leader would not be aware of or think to include. Other motives can include the desire to be seen as open-minded, innovative, caring, and willing to change.
- b) Nevertheless, where such a substitution has been tried, it has been a significant distraction to a considerable number of people. The forming of the small group for prayer causes these worshipers to feel uncomfortable to varying degrees. Just

¹⁴ In love for worshipers who have concern about exposure to germs, including especially those with health issues, we need to take this concern into account in what we include in our worship planning and in what we say during the worship service spontaneously. Pertaining to germs, researchers at the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences at Aberystwyth University in Wales have cited documentation that “fist bumps are 20 times more hygienic than handshakes. They are also 10 times cleaner than high-fives,” according to results published in the *American Journal of Infection Control*,” as reported in the *McClatchy-Tribune. Reporter-Herald*, July 29, 2014, p. 6A.

¹⁵ Many people’s attention spans are short, and they forget to “keep the main thing the main thing.” Also, think about how long even 30 seconds can seem to people, especially visitors, when no one comes by and greets them with the Peace of Christ or a warm expression of any kind. It is painful (talk about distractions!), and healthy people avoid pain; too many (one may be too many for some people) of such hurtful experiences are likely to cause people to go elsewhere on Sunday mornings. Pastors and other worship leaders need to educate and periodically remind the congregation (e.g., in the church newsletter, in Sunday school classes, and through brief reminders transitioning to the Passing of the Peace) how to “Greet also someone you don’t know.”

a few of the questions immediately emerging in their minds and hearts are: which group do I join? I can't pray out loud with others; do I have to do this? What if I make a mistake? I don't know these people or their needs; do I have to share my concerns with them? What will they think of me? What if they don't want me to be in their group? What if I don't want to be in that group? What if I start to pray at the same time someone else does? That will be embarrassing! (Some think.)

- c. Before introducing anything new in corporate worship, be sure to consider at least the following questions:
- 1) Why do I want to introduce this innovation? What are my real motives? So I can show my peers I'm avant-garde, or at least "with it," should **not** be one of the motives.
 - 2) Have I carefully thought through this change, including how it will affect all types of people who attend and who may attend? Have I discussed this new concept with enough trusted individuals, including those who have the perspective-taking ability to put themselves in the place of others and who have the strength and courage to tell me what I need to hear and not just what I want to hear?
 - 3) Can I field test this new idea, and am I willing to discontinue it if it doesn't work out well?
 - 4) Will this new idea cause discomfort to the extent that people will be distracted from God's worship? Or worse, stay away?!
 - 5) Will the new way of doing this new thing, be counterproductive to other values and goals we have? For example, people tend to avoid pain, emotional as well as physical, and they tend to dislike losing their freedom.
 - a) Will forcing them into a situation in worship cause them to feel uncomfortable to the extent that they will become angry for the rest of the worship service (as has occurred, with some even standing up and leaving in the midst of the service) and miss the blessings God's worship offers them?
 - b) Will they stop coming, and tell others, thus reducing the growth of the congregation, spiritually and numerically, and mitigate outreach?
 - 6) Introducing innovations in worship and in other aspects of the life and work of the church is sometimes important to do, but to be successful, it must be *well-planned* ahead of time, done carefully and with attention to some significant aspects of the dynamics operative in social systems. Avoid implementing a change as soon as an idea occurs, especially during a worship service. For other vital factors to consider before introducing innovations, see Lesson Nine.
- d. Anything, even including something that is worthwhile doing, e.g., greeting one another, that is not carefully planned and is out of place, is a distraction that diverts worshippers' attention from their meaningful dialogue with God that he has called them to have with

him. Such distractions hinder, and do not help, them attend to what God desires to tell them in his Word, and from what they want to say to him.

- e. **DISCUSS:** When could these developments, that are necessary aspects of church life and worship, be done without distracting worshipers in their dialogue with God? Give them time to think, and let the attendees answer. If they don't include the answers below, provide these answers before asking the next question. Be sure to invite any discussion of these answers that follow.
- 1) What about the seating of people who arrive late? Instruct ushers or others in authority to not allow late-comers to walk in during Scripture reading or prayer; invite them to find a seat during a hymn or song, then hospitably help them to do so.
 - 2) When should announcements, e.g., upcoming church events, be made? Congregations have found that placing the announcements after the Sending/Benediction when everyone is present, including late-comers, means the maximum number of people will hear the announcements. This is a fitting place for the announcements, most if not all of which indicate some ways God continues to be with and bless his worshipers.
 - 3) If one is used, when should the attendance registry be passed through the pews for signing the registry? If this is done during the announcements, the distraction is eliminated and questions can be answered. Can the information be obtained in another way?
 - 4) Encouraging the worshipers to greet and extend the peace of Christ with one another on the way out of the sanctuary, or following the benediction, if the announcements are given after the worship service, will avoid drawing their attention away from God's communication with them during worship.
 - 5) Distractions can be counterproductive not only to worshipping God, but also to the accomplishment of other valuable objectives. For example, many if not most churches face stewardship challenges from time to time, if not chronically. Yet one of the most popular times to pass the attendance registry book is during the offering, which *turns away* worshipers' attention to and reflection on their giving to God—a significant opportunity to respond to God in his worship.
 - 6) Which is more important: to obtain a record of people's attendance and allow those on their right and left to see who is sitting next to them, or to do all we can to facilitate their understanding, appreciation, and love of giving as a vital means through which God is accomplishing his redemptive purposes locally, nationally, and throughout the world—and to do so in conscious communication with God himself? As people concentrate on what they are doing, giving something very valuable to them to the Most Holy and Most Gracious Sovereign Creator, Owner, Redeemer, and Sustainer of the Universe, the Triune God Almighty, who will do something exceedingly important with what they are giving of themselves, an excitement emerges and grows—until someone nudges them with the attendance book—and the budding, building, beautiful and expansive excitement about being a significant part

of God's plan comes crashing down to a mundane exercise that could be achieved more effectively, and generate interest and joy, at another time, such as during the announcements.

"But wait!" someone says. "If they sign the attendance registers during the announcements, their attention will be taken away from what I'm saying to them, and they'll miss something." Hmm. I wonder what God thinks, and how he feels, when this distraction diverts the worshipers' attention while he is engaging his people during the Offering, which he has commanded them to bring to him. (Exodus 34:20; Deuteronomy 16:16-17; Malachi 3:8-12; 2 Corinthians 9:6-9)

- 7) How can those developments that are not necessary aspects of church worship be eliminated or mitigated to facilitate worship that glorifies God and equips his people for his service? (For example, eliminating what some pastors like to do: asking for a show of hands in answer to a question, which puts people on the spot and forces them to do something they don't want to do. Here is another illustration of the pastor, who typically has the strength to state his or her opinions without concern for whether people like what he or she says, but not first taking the perspective of the people in the pews, many of whom don't want to state in front of a lot of other, or any, people what they think in answer to that question. Sometimes they may not even have an answer, and in either case it is embarrassing to them to not raise their hand, which makes them uncomfortable, even feel emotional pain, which is a huge distraction that can grow into aversion and nonattendance if the pastor does this questioning frequently.) If no one responds to this question, do the following:
 - a) Say, "That's not a rhetorical question. Think about it for a moment and tell me what you think." Then allow 30 seconds to a minute for silent reflection.
 - b) If no one says anything, say "OK, this is a very important subject before us, and we need to reflect on it together. To help, let's go back into our groups of four and discuss the question. Then I'd like a recorder to write down what your group concludes and share what your group thinks, one thought at a time, with the rest of us. Take about five minutes."
- f. Throughout the lessons that follow in this course, distractions pertaining to the subject of focus will be discussed in those sections as well.
- g. Note to church leaders in the majority world: As I have met with church leaders in many countries, I find an inclination to adopt ideas and practices church leaders are employing in the West, and particularly in the United States. **Please** be discerning in this matter. Many church leaders in the West are vulnerable to fads and to "jumping on bandwagons," and every year or so there's a new bandwagon rolling into town. Sometimes these ideas have value in facilitating people's worship of God; sometimes these ideas produce unintended consequences and are counterproductive. Carefully consider whether a new idea is wheat or chaff, and look before you jump!

One example of not-well-thought-through ideas pastors and other worship leaders come up with and then gleefully pass along to others, wherein they become another

bandwagon, are a variety of “feel good” techniques they think will evoke deep emotions, even tears of joy, in worshipers. On the contrary it can, and does, have the opposite effect among a considerable number of people in the pews: a strong aversion to what is being asked of them and, if repeated, the decision to not return to worship in that congregation.

For example, prior to prayer, some pastors say, “Please hold the hand of the person sitting next to you as a way to indicate our common bond in Christ as we come to the Lord in prayer.” Other pastors say, “If you feel comfortable, please hold the hand....” Either expression is perceived as mandatory and places people in an uncomfortable position. How do they say “No,” rejecting the pastor’s imperative and refusing to take the hand of the person next to them without offending that person or implying rejection of that person reaching out to the one not wanting to hold anyone’s hand? Pastors and worship leaders must keep in mind the reality that some in the congregation come from painful past experiences with abusive relationships, e.g., women and girls who have been abused by males in their lives, which experiences have been traumatic and continue to cause great difficulty for them. Others come from cultures and or family backgrounds where such hand-holding is not done. How are they supposed to feel comfortable taking the hand of a man sitting next to them who they don’t know, or don’t know well enough to feel comfortable holding his hand? Other worshipers are concerned about germs, especially during times of cold and flu, and they don’t want to hold the hands of others outside their family.

We need to do all we can as worship leaders to *provide safe personal space* for all worshipers and do nothing to violate their personal space needs. To do so, we need to *plan ahead of time* what we think would be a good idea, *take the perspective* of all in the congregation and reflect on how this idea will be perceived and experienced, and it would be good in our planning to *discuss this new idea with others who have the wisdom and strength to tell us the truth* and not just what we want to hear but would be to the detriment of others in the congregation, including detracting from their worship.

For the sake of God and his people, be careful of whom you ask for this feedback. We all know people we can ask who will tell us just what we want to hear. This does not serve God or his people well, and it doesn’t help the pastor either. Further, after selecting those who will give you the feedback you truly seek and need to hear, it will help even these strong people to do so, if we say words to this effect: “I’m thinking of doing this in our worship service. Please tell me honestly if you think it’s a good idea. Could it possibly make some feel uncomfortable or cause them mental or emotional pain? These are God’s people; I need to know that something I’m planning to do will not interfere with their worship of God.” Then, listen. Carefully. And genuinely and sincerely thank them for an honest answer, even if it’s not what you wanted to hear.

Thoughtless “feel good” ideas that some may like, can be viewed on a continuum of negativity for others, a range that runs from fearful at worst to distasteful and annoying, thus evoking an enormous distraction from God who desires to help not hinder his children, and for whom none of these “feel good” gestures motivates the desire to return. Rather than attract people’s attention to God, these gestures distract the worshipers. We need to facilitate people’s focus on and connection with God in his worship and avoid

trying to manipulate emotions that hinder rather than help. The Holy Spirit will provide all the necessary stirring of our hearts as well as our minds as we connect with him. Another example of such pastoral bandwagons follows in the next section.

Specific Acts of Worship in the Bible

5. Let's now take a closer look at what God's people do in worship as taught in the Bible. In the groups of four assign each member at least one of the texts in the chart below.
 - a. Ask each person to work individually at first and identify the elements of a worship service that are mentioned in these Bible texts. Before letting the groups begin, give an example. Use Appendices A and E. Select a volunteer to read aloud 1 Chronicles 16:28-29. Then ask, "What is the text telling us about what occurred in this event?" Discuss this question briefly until the group arrives at the awareness of the giving of an offering. If some finish early, give them one or more texts to examine.

1 Chronicles 16:28-29	Ezra 9:5-7	Psalms 95:1-11
Psalms 101:1-8	Psalms 150:1-6	Jeremiah 31:31-34
Lamentations 2:11-12	Matthew 26:26-30	Acts 2:42-47
Acts 13:13-15	Acts 22:12-16	1 Corinthians 11:17-33
1 Corinthians 12:12-13	Hebrews 13:20-21	1 Timothy 2:1-10

If someone mentions praise as an aspect of worship in this passage, accept the comment but also remind the group of what Jesus said, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." (John 15:8 NASB) The Lord is teaching that more than words is necessary to glorify God; in 1 Chronicles 16:28-29 the way being emphasized to glorify God is by bringing an offering to him in his worship.

How is it being emphasized? We can tell by the verbs in the Hebrew text. All three verbs, "bring" (an offering), "come" (before Him), and "worship" (the LORD) are imperatives, i.e., commands. Also the Hebrew verb translated worship is in the Hitpa'el conjugation or form of the verb which indicates intensity, giving force and emphasis typically in a reflexive sense, i.e., including emphasis on the key dialogical dimension of worship. Giving is not an option that we can ignore; it is part of our calling, our purpose in life. Like all of God's commands, he knows what is best for us, even when we don't know it, similar to our parents' commanding us to do something when we were children, and requiring us to do so for our own good, even when we couldn't see the good in it. We should give, and give cheerfully, being glad we can give, thanking God the Father, the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17) that he has given us enough that we can give some in thanksgiving for the accomplishment of his purposes. The cheerful part will increase as we do so throughout our lives, growing in our relationship with our Triune God and as we learn more about the great work God will do with our gifts in and through the church locally, nationally, and internationally to accomplish his plan of redemption of his creation.

The offering should be part of the worship service, in particular that part of God's worship when we respond to his grace to us in the Word and sacraments. We immediately respond in word through the Confession of Faith (e.g., the Nicene Creed) and in deed (by giving our tithes and offerings), always to be seen as an *expression* of *gratitude* for God's grace, *never* as a *means* to receive his grace. It should be part of the believers' Responding to God's Word in gratitude. (See Lesson Two.) It is a blessing to give (cf. Acts 20:35) as part of our response to God's Word.

Some people give online through their digital devices. That's OK, but it's most meaningfully experienced if it is done during the Responding to God's Word part of the service.

- b. Circulate among the groups to answer any questions. When most individuals have completed the task, ask them to share their findings with the others in the group.
- c. When the groups have had sufficient time to discuss their assigned texts, ask them for your attention and request one person from each group to report the group's findings, one from each group at a time. As they do so, write what each person says on the newsprint. Use the listing of the worship texts in Appendix A to add any elements the group missed. The elements are written in upper case letters.
- d. Before leaving the subject of the elements of worship, and the offering in particular, emphasize to the class the importance of always remembering, and teaching, the Biblical basis of the elements. Doing so is especially vital at this time in history when pastors and worship leaders are inclined to let their heart, their emotions and feelings, rule their head, rather than function according to the order God has created us to follow: using our heads, our cognitive thinking, to discern between what is right and what is wrong, particularly pertaining to his worship. Here we see one of the bandwagons pertaining to the offering.

Some in recent decades have thought it would be "nice" to make an announcement that "Today, you see offering baskets on the table in the chancel, which already have money in them. As you come forward, you may make an offering, or, if you have a need, you can take some out, for either yourself or someone you know who is poor." This announcement has also been made to congregations when the offering plate is passed from one person to another in their rows. This is one of those "feel good" ideas that touches the heart of some people, but upon careful thought reveals a serious and unwise distortion of an important aspect of worship. Consider these questions:

- 1) How does taking money out of the offering plate enable the worshiper to express gratitude to God by giving a gift in thanksgiving to Him for all He has done for the worshiper?
 - Answer: It doesn't. Some may say, "Well, what about someone who is so poor he or she doesn't have enough to give?"
 - a) Answer: Remember Jesus' pointing out to his disciples the poor widow in the temple who was only able to give two very small copper coins, in contrast to the wealthy, but the Lord said the poor widow out of her poverty gave all she had, which was more than the rich gave. (Luke 21:1-4)

- b) We also need to remember Jesus' words that "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) We should not deprive anyone of the blessing of giving to the Lord in gratitude to Him, and we certainly should not teach them that it is OK not to give.
 - c) In a majority world country, and even more so in a wealthy country where the government supplies financial aid, everyone can give something to the Lord, and should, as we see in the Scriptures.
- 2) God has given the church the responsibility to be stewards of his gifts. How is a practice such as this announcement good stewardship?
- a) How do you know the ones taking money out are those who need it most? Or even at all?
 - b) How do you know that those who take out some money don't need much more?
 - c) Who monitors how the money is spent, for what purposes?
 - d) How do the people who have given an offering to the Lord feel about not knowing how their money will be used? Many indigent people have gotten that way due to making wrong choices in the spending of the money they had. Is that a wise use of the Lord's money?
 - e) How does this indiscriminate largess help the ones taking the money resolve their most important need: to overcome the root cause(s) of their financial crisis?
 - f) How do you justify reinforcing the dependency of those who need help, by giving them only a handout, which will quickly be spent, rather than a hand up, to help them have the counseling they need in order to "get back on their feet" and manage their lives, and in particular their finances, much better? They need help to learn how to plan, to budget, and to spend wisely, within their means. If they need a job, church counselors can help them learn how to pray, equip themselves for a job search, and make connections with employers, even sometimes with employers in the church.
- 3) What is the motivation for this announcement? Who is it really helping? Who would be inclined to take something in front of a whole congregation of onlookers? Does it not lower the already low self-esteem, diminish the dignity of, and embarrass a poor person, in his or her own sight, and in the sight of many others, to make this withdrawal in such public view?

For those who say they are taking the money for someone in need, raise the above questions and urge them to ask the "someone in need" to contact the church for help. Such help will be in private and with someone equipped and committed to provide the necessary assistance, including counseling, over time.

- 4) To help the poor in the surrounding community and in the church, it is much more effective to do as other congregations do and establish a community assistance fund

for nonmembers and a financial aid section of the church budget to help members in need, that are administered by trained volunteer counselors who are members of, and approved by, the church, in which poor people are invited to meet with a counselor, who can talk with them about their own individual circumstances, what has caused their financial crisis, and guide them to establish a plan to overcome the crisis. More than short-term help is required; we must view their situation as a long-term process. Such help is necessary to enable those in poverty situations to successfully resolve their problems, since all people are different and have different backgrounds that have led to their struggle; therefore, they need individual counsel and assistance.

Lack of money is only a symptom of a deeper cause of the problem. That cause has to be addressed and overcome in order to help the person sustainably succeed over time. An even greater benefit results: Over time relationships are established that can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, lead the person in crisis to either become a believer in Christ or, if already a believer, mature in Christlikeness.

A Biblical Basis for Planning Worship Services

6. What can we learn from God's Word about what to include in his worship?
 - a. As we have seen in the texts we've examined and in many other Bible passages, God's worship includes many elements. However, there are several that most commonly appear throughout Scripture. Let's look at them specifically.
 - b. Turn to the flipchart page (or the overhead transparency or chalkboard) on which you have copied Appendix B, a portion of which is seen in the chart below.
 - c. Ask the participants to take a piece of paper and match the Bible texts (numbered 1, 2, 3, etc.) with the appropriate parts of worship (labeled A, B, C, etc.) for which those texts are the base. For example, read the Scripture text in Box 5 (1 Corinthians 11:24, 25), and ask the group, "For what part of a worship service is that text the base and authority?" When they correctly answer "A, The Lord's Supper/Eucharist," ask them to do the same with the other Bible texts and worship parts, at first individually, then in their small groups.
 - d. Ask the participants to return to their groups in which they have been working. Ask them to come to a consensus regarding the matches each person made individually.

For an alternative to tasks c. and d., and to engage the students even more actively in this learning activity, make a copy of Appendix B for each group. Ask them to tear out the boxes and then as a group match them as above. Did any group correctly match all the parts of worship with the appropriate Scripture texts? Did all do so? Give a copy of Appendix B to each participant to take home for future use. The first part of Appendix B is shown in the following graphic.

Appendix B: Worship Elements and Supporting Bible Texts

Lesson One Activity #3

<p>Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, (Ephesians 5:19)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">1</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Lord's Supper/Eucharist</p> <p style="text-align: right;">A</p>
<p>On the first day of the week we came together...Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. (Acts 20:7)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">2</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Offering</p> <p style="text-align: right;">B</p>
<p>May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">3</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Psalms/Hymns/Songs (Application of Message)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">C</p>

- e. Next, ask the group as a whole if they have any questions about the matches, and discuss with them the following suggested matches (correct, or Biblically permissible, answers): 1 C, 2 E, 3 F, 4 I, 5 A, 6 K, 7 H, 8 M, 9 J, 10 G, 11 D, 12 B, 13 L.
- f. One question that may arise, especially by those from Pentecostal and similar churches, is with respect to the Confession of Faith part of worship. They may wonder why such an activity should take place in worship, and all may wonder why Exodus 24:7 is the Bible text reference supporting such a worship activity. Ask the group as a whole if anyone has and any others have an answer to that question. Offer any part or all of the following explanation that is not mentioned by any who respond in the group.
- 1) Notice in the Exodus 24 passage, and in other Bible passages, such as Joshua 24, that in a worship setting the people typically respond to the Word of God with a statement of their commitment to keep the Word and apply it obediently in their daily life. In Acts 2:42 we read, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." This Bible text indicates that the first century church did base their faith on the teaching of the apostles, a summary of which is in the historic Apostles' Creed, the reciting of which is a centuries-old weekly worship tradition in many churches, a reinforcement to believers of their Biblical faith, and a witness to any nonbelievers who may be present as well as a refutation of cultic and other unbiblical teachings that confuse and mislead many people. Notice that fellowship is a key part of worship and afterward.

The historic Nicene Creed, which is used in most churches throughout the world, is even more so. In using an historic confession that the followers of Christ all over the

world have used for centuries, even millennia, the church communicates that the Christian faith contains certain core concepts that are universally held, are not culture bound, and that believers don't just make up what seems good to them as they go along through life. The universally held historic creeds reduce the free-wheeling wanton and wrong interpretations of Bible texts that mislead people. Such creedal statements are highly valuable, and even necessary, to facilitate unity in the body of Christ locally and globally, as churches everywhere throughout history have experienced; see, e.g., in China.¹⁶

In addition to the Apostles' Creed, other Biblically based creeds that Christian churches have used through the centuries in worship include the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. If your church uses the Nicene Creed, print and/or project it in the first person plural in accord with the original version.

- 2) At this point be sure to mention that while Christians throughout the world have been using a form of the Apostles' Creed in their worship services, at least since the early third century, it is not required, and it is not required that we do so each week, but many churches do so for these and other reasons. However, for the reasons we've just been considering, if you don't now use the Apostles' Creed, it might be a good idea to introduce to your fellowship the suggestion of using it, at least on certain occasions at first. If doing so would be new to your congregation, use the principles we will discuss in Lesson Nine "Helpful Steps for Trying Something New."

If you don't use the Apostles' Creed or another creed, consider providing some other means for the people to publicly confess their faith in the Triune God they have come to worship. If your church decides to write its own creed be careful to cover all the main subjects, as the historic creeds do, and be sure to make it consistent with the Bible, which involves carefully wording the statements so that everyone understands the words in the same way—not an easy task. A great value of using one of the historic creeds is the constant link with the church catholic (global, universal), reminding the congregation that they are worshiping God with brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world, as well as with the church in heaven.

- 3) If you decide at least for the present to not use one of the historic creeds for your congregation's Confession of Faith, or for a change from using the creeds, it would be effective to use Philippians 2:6-11 as the confession. This passage is considered by Bible scholars to be one of the first confessions of faith in the early church.

- Since the cadence of the Greek appears to be in the form of a hymn for liturgical use, consider singing it. One modern expression for doing so is the song, "Christ, Who Is in the Form of God."

- g. In this session we have been examining Old and New Testament texts to discover what God's people have done in their worship since Bible times. It is important to do so, since

¹⁶ See David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003), pp. 314 ff.

God commands that his worship be done according to his Word. However, we should remember two points in this regard:

- 1) God has not prescribed a specific set of elements that must occur in every worship service. Even in the Bible, some things people did in one worship service were either not done or at least not recorded in the Biblical record of other worship services.
- 2) We thus see that we have a certain amount of freedom in the planning of God's worship. In these lessons we are examining the minimum number of elements of worship services in the Bible that characterize acceptable worship by God, but other things are permissible if they are in accord with his Word. (In Lesson Three we'll study Biblical principles for planning worship, which will provide guidelines for determining what is and is not acceptable to God.) This means we can add elements that are consistent with the Bible that are not normally a part of the worship services we see in churches today.

For example, we see in worship times recorded in the Bible that God's people responded to his Word with a statement that they would obey it (as in Exodus 24:7, Joshua 24:24, Nehemiah 10:28-30 ff.). In our times we can certainly see the value of having such an opportunity for people to commit themselves to obeying God today as well. You might want to add a statement that your people would make in your worship service in the response to God that will enable them to testify to their commitment to be faithful in their daily lives in the Lord's service.

➤ DISCUSS:

- a) In what other ways can your liturgy or order of service facilitate the worshippers' commitment to obey? List responses of the group. Include any of the following the group doesn't mention.
 - 1- A line item in the order of service (in the Responding to God's Word section)
 - 2- A litany of prayer¹⁷
 - 3- A song
 - 4- A creedal commitment
 - 5- A catechism question. Some congregations include a related question and answer from their denomination's catechism in their Commitment to Obey God's Word section of the RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD part of the liturgy. (See Lesson Two.)
- b) How might we implement this practice in our congregation's worship? As suggestions are offered, list them on the newsprint.

¹⁷ A litany is an intercessory or praise prayer that is read or sung responsively. A Biblical example is Psalm 136.

Renewing the Covenant in Our Worship

7. As we read in Nehemiah 9:38, “In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.” (Then follows 10:1-27 where their names are listed. Their inclusion in the Word of God shows how important this covenant renewal was and still is, and how we are connected with them in Christ [Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Galatians 3:29].)
 - a. The covenant with Abraham, renewed in Christ, is a major motif in the Bible and is a key to understanding the Word of God.
 - b. The words “making a binding agreement” are a translation of the Hebrew, “cutting an agreement.”
 - 1) Cutting is a word associated with the making of a covenant. It refers to the process of sacrificing an animal and the parties participating in the covenant walking between the pieces as a graphic demonstration indicating that whoever would break the covenant would become like the cut up animal. (Genesis 15:6-19)
 - 2) The word “agreement” with “cutting” indicates a renewal of the covenant commitments of God’s people.
 - 3) For more information on this major teaching of the covenant throughout the Bible, see the PowerPoint program, [“Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God’s Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity.”](#)
 - c. When we promise to obey God in our worship services, e.g., in prayer or in song, we are renewing our covenant commitments to him.

Planning the Worship Service for Lesson Six

8. In order to most effectively learn how to plan worship according to the Biblical principles we’ve been and will be studying in this manual, it is important to experience leading them in the process of learning. In these workshops we’ll plan and then conduct in Lesson Six a service of worship. In the planning and conducting of this worship service, we’ll all be involved.

It should be mentioned here that early on in its work together the group should decide on the theme of the service (e.g., Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Love, Patience, Service), so that the person selected to present the sermon may be given time to prepare. If time allows at the end of each lesson, an opportunity will be provided for each group to work on its part of the planning. Otherwise the groups will need to meet in their free time. Ask them to use what they are learning to help in the planning of their part of the service.

- a. We’ll need three groups to plan the worship service. (If your workshop has a small number of participants, either assign a smaller number of groups and combine the tasks

into those groups or, if the workshop is especially limited in attendance, do all the tasks as a whole group.) Write the following three task group designations on the flipchart, and ask for volunteers for each. Write their names on the flipchart.

- 1) A group to plan the order of service
- 2) A group to plan and compose the prayers
- 3) A group to plan and lead the musical parts of the service

b. Give the groups their task descriptions as follows:

1) Order of Service Group

- a) Talk with the person who is giving the sermon to see what the main point of the sermon will be and hence the theme to which the other parts of the service should relate, such as the music and prayers. Announce to the other groups as soon as possible what that theme is to help them in their planning.
- b) Plan the specific parts of the service.
- c) Plan where in the order of service each part comes.
- d) Write transitions for all parts needed (except for the prayers, which the Prayers Group will do).
- e) When your group has completed its work, write the order of service on the flipchart.
- f) Arrange the room where the worship service is to be held, making sure that all elements needed (e.g., pulpit, Bibles, song sheets) will be in place before Lesson Six begins.

2) Prayers Group

- a) Identify the different prayers that need to be offered.
- b) Compose the prayers. The whole group should suggest subjects to include in each prayer, especially in the Prayer of Confession and in the General Prayers.
- c) Write transitions for the prayers.
- d) Talk with the Order of Service Group to agree on when they should come in the service.
- e) Agree on who will offer what prayers in the service. For each prayer (e.g., Prayer of Confession, Prayer for Blessing on the Word, General Prayers) let a different person offer the prayer in order to involve as many people as possible.

3) Music Group

- a) Select all music and musicians for the service (psalms/hymns/songs; choral and instrumental presentations; soloists).
- b) Talk with the Order of Service Group to agree on when the musical selections should occur in the service.
- c) Agree on times for the musicians to practice and then do so.

c. Show the group the checklist in Appendix D, “A Checklist for Corporate Worship Planning and Preparation,” which you’ve previously put on the flipchart, and ask them to use it in their part of the worship planning. Mention that they’ll be studying the details of the checklist in the lessons throughout this workshop. Place the checklist on the wall where all the groups can refer to it easily.

9. For any of the cognitive objectives you have not as yet observed the stated behavior, distribute file cards as needed, and ask the students to give you the stipulated responses. Be sure to ask them to sign their name on each card. Or, you can verbally ask the class, corporately in session or selected representative individuals, and/or those about whom you have a special concern, in or outside the class (especially outside and individually for those about whom you are concerned in order to avoid embarrassment and to facilitate their responses), to do the behaviors specified in the objectives. Review the instruction as needed, for any objectives that are not accomplished as you intend them to be. Doing so in class, will help those who need the remedial help and be a good memory refresher and reinforcer for those who have accomplished the objectives.

Action Plan Steps for Lesson One

10. For the remaining time in this session, let's begin to construct our Action Plans. First individually, then in your groups of four, reflect on the following questions:
 - a. How many parts of worship in the Bible is our church already including in its worship services?
 - b. Is there anything we should add to our worship service that we are not now doing?
 - c. Is there anything we are doing that we should do differently?
11. Describe a specific realistic plan for implementing a means to include any Biblical elements of worship that your local church is not now doing.
12. Announce that in the next session we'll examine the subject of the meaning of what we do in corporate worship.
13. Offer a closing prayer, asking God's help to apply what has been learned in this lesson as he would have us do in the church(es) we are serving.

The Meaning of What We Do in Corporate Worship

Needs of the Learners:

1. Felt Needs:
 - a. See Lesson One section on felt needs.
 - b. Include here the needs the students identified in Lesson One that are applicable to the subjects in this lesson.
2. Unfelt Needs:

All the students need to learn the Biblical teaching on and how to develop and implement the following competencies:

 - a. The meaning of the specific and essential aspects of historic Christian worship, including in the Bible.
 - b. The logical placement of the parts of worship, why each part occurs where it does in the worship service.
 - c. The historic Christian liturgy.
 - d. A specific Action Plan to teach and put into place what they are learning in the church congregation(s) they serve.

Goal: This lesson will help the participants understand Biblical worship as God's calling his people together to worship him and that worship involves a dialogue with him. The class will also study the meaning of the parts of Christian worship according the teaching of the Bible, learn the logic of the liturgy, construct a model for Christian worship, and to begin a specific Action Plan to implement these teachings of the Bible in their own churches.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson each participant will be able to do the following:

1. Identify, list in order, and explain the meaning of each of the elements of Biblical corporate Christian worship within each of the four main sections of worship.
2. Define the concept of transitions between the elements of corporate worship, cite at least two reasons why transitions statements are important, and identify at least one example of a transition statement.
3. Construct in writing a model of corporate Christian worship that he or she will use in his or her home church.
4. Identify in writing at least two specific ways he or she will explain the meaning of Christian worship to his or her home church congregation and in particular to leaders and potential leaders.
5. Asked to recite, or record on 3 x 5 cards, and explain the meaning and logical relationship of the four main sections of worship and each of the components in order within all four sections, at least 75% of the students will express joy and enthusiasm in doing so.
6. Participate with others in planning a public corporate Christian worship service and begin working on at least one aspect of that service in which he or she will lead when the service is held during Lesson Six.
7. Produce the next part of an Action Plan for his or her home church containing at least one idea from this lesson that he or she wants to implement and at least one SMART step to do so.
8. By the end of this course, at least 75% of the class will report to the teacher, verbally or in writing,

- a. that they feel more confident in explaining to others the Biblical parts of Christian corporate worship, their meaning, and the logic of the liturgy,
 - b. and that they feel more motivated and able to implement needed changes in the worship practices of their congregation.
9. Within three months of the end of this course, at least 75% of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via text, via email or by regular mail) that they have implemented in their congregation's worship services at least three aspects of what they learned in this course.
 10. Within three months of the end of this course, all the students will have begun to implement at least three elements of their Action Plan pertaining to this lesson within the congregation(s) they serve.

Materials Needed

1. The same materials as in Lesson One.
2. At least one 3 x 5 file card for each participant. These are always helpful for many purposes.
3. If possible, one copy of Appendix C for each small group and one additional copy for each member of the class to take home.

Introduction

1. Review: What did we learn from our previous lesson? Discuss and list responses on the flipchart.
2. Ask for brief (two minutes or less) reports on the Action Plans developed at the end of the last lesson. List them on the flipchart as they are given. Discuss the most promising.
3. Ask the question, "Now that we know essential parts of worship in the Bible, how do we explain to people what they mean and in what order to place them in the worship service?"

The Meaning of the Parts of Christian Worship

1. Opening: Welcome; read a brief Bible passage related to today's lesson; offer prayer. Let's now consider the meaning of what the Bible says about the specific parts of worship.
 - a. Turn to the flipchart page on which you have copied the third column of the table in Appendix C, a portion of which is reproduced in the following chart.

Worship Elements, Related Bible Texts, and Meaning Statements

Lesson Two Activity #1

<p>Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, (Ephesians 5:19)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">1</p>	<p>The Lord's Supper/Eucharist</p> <p style="text-align: right;">A</p>	<p>A statement from the Bible that gives surety to those who have confessed their sins that they are forgiven and have peace with God because of their faith in Jesus Christ</p> <p style="text-align: right;">a</p>
<p>On the first day of the week we came together...Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. (Acts 20:7)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">2</p>	<p>Offering</p> <p style="text-align: right;">B</p>	<p>Communication with God in which the congregation offers him their adoration, thanksgiving, and supplication for others and for themselves</p> <p style="text-align: right;">b</p>
<p>May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">3</p>	<p>Psalms/Hymns/Songs</p> <p style="text-align: right;">C</p>	<p>Acknowledgment of our sin and guilt, asking forgiveness, resolving to obey, and admission of the need to do so in order to abide in the presence of God who is most holy</p> <p style="text-align: right;">c</p>

- b. Put the flipchart pages you have been using near the flipchart on a wall so you can refer to them easily. Ask the participants to take the same piece of paper they used in the matching activity in Lesson One and, working individually, match the parts of worship (lettered A, B, C, etc.) with the appropriate statement which explains the meaning of that element of worship services. For example, read the text in Box "a" and ask the group, "What part of a worship service does that statement explain?" When they correctly answer "I, Assurance of Pardon," ask them to do the same with the other statements of meaning and worship parts.
- c. Next ask the participants to return to their groups of four in which they have been working. Ask the groups to come to a consensus regarding the matches each person made individually.

For an alternative to tasks b. and c., and to engage the students even more actively in this learning activity, make a copy of Appendix C for each group. Ask them to tear out the boxes and then as a group match them as above.

- d. When they have finished, ask the group as a whole if they have any questions about the matches, and discuss with them the following suggested matches (correct, or Biblically permissible, answers): (5) A k; (12) B h; (1) C j; (11) D b; (2) E I; (3) F d; (10) G l;

(7) H m; (4) I a; (9) J f; (6) K c; (13) L e; (8) M g. Did any group correctly match all the parts of worship with the appropriate Scripture texts and meaning statements? Did all do so? Give a copy of Appendix C to each participant to take home for future use.

- **Make sure everyone understands the meaning of the parts of the worship service. This understanding is very important. For example, the sermon is an explanation and application of a passage from God’s Word; as you have learned from the preaching manual and workshop, it is not the occasion for the speaker’s political views or for a review of the latest book the pastor has read. Also, the offering given is the people’s grateful response to God’s grace in Jesus Christ, not a means of their trying to earn merit. Ask the group if they have any questions. Allow sufficient time to explain the meaning of the parts of a worship service. Use the Meaning statements and their corresponding Bible Texts as bases for your explanations.**

e. Ask the group the following questions:

- 1) Do you see the importance of carefully planning each part of the worship service?
- 2) Do you see how each part is a blessing to the people and honors God?

Dialogue with God in Worship

2. As we look at the parts of a worship service and consider their meaning, we remember what we observed in Lesson One, that Christian worship based on the Bible involves a dialogue between God and his people. God has called his people together to approach and meet with him. One of the next questions that comes to mind is, “How do these parts of a worship service fit within the four main categories of worship: Gathering to God, Proclaiming God’s Word, Responding to God, and Receiving God’s Benedictory Sending of us back into the world to serve him?”
3. Write the four main categories on the flipchart, leaving space to write under each.
 - a. Instruct the group to do the following: For this next task, work with a person sitting next to you and discuss which of the 13 parts of worship should go in which category (Gathering to God, Proclaiming God’s Word, Responding to God; God’s Sending of Us) according to what we’ve observed in our study of the Bible texts. For example, in which category would you put “Bible Reading?” (Proclaiming God’s Word) Now do the rest with your partner, discussing with him or her which category seems best for each.
 - b. **Do not now consider the order of the parts of worship within each category. We’ll take up that subject later.**
 - c. After most of the groups of two have completed their work, or after 10 minutes, ask them as a large group which worship parts belong in which categories. If there are any questions, explain the reasons for the suggested placements (correct or Biblically permissible answers) that follow (I = Gathering to God; II = Proclaiming God’s Word;

III = Responding to God; IV = Receiving God's Benedictory Sending). Write them in the appropriate categories on the flipchart as you discuss them.

- 1) A II (The sacrament is a means of God's grace to us.)
- 2) B III
- 3) C I, II, and III
- 4) D III
- 5) E II
- 6) F III, and IV
- 7) G II
- 8) H I
- 9) I I (Though the Assurance of Pardon comes from God's Word, it is part of the cleansing necessary as we approach God who is most holy. [Psalm 24:3-4] This part of worship is an especially clear illustration of the dialogue that is going on in worship.)
- 10) J I or II
- 11) K I
- 12) L III
- 13) M I or II

An Order for the Parts of Worship

4. Next say to the group, "Now discuss with your partner the order in which the parts of worship should occur in each of the four categories. As you discuss the order, consider this question: Which order would the people in our church find most meaningful (including Biblically significant and logical) and inspiring?"
 - After the groups of two have spent 10 minutes at this task, ask them to come together in the large group and report their findings. Ask each group of two to report on just one of their placements at a time. Then discuss each as a group.

A Model of Christian Corporate Worship

5. Many attendees of these workshops have requested a model worship service to use as a Biblically based guide for planning worship. From our study in these first two lessons the following emerges as such a model.
 - a. Mention to the participants that while different churches, occasions, and circumstances may necessitate some alterations to the following Biblically permissible order, this basic pattern has long been used throughout church history all over the world in Christian public worship services (even though churches have embellished some parts, have placed certain ones in different places, and have ignored others). Further, human beings individually and corporately tend to function according to predictable patterns. Not only individuals but groups which meet regularly typically develop procedures which are comfortable to them, and they like to repeat those activities which give them pleasure and joy. For example, families in every culture have their own order and ritual when they

have a meal together. Therefore, it is not surprising to observe that all churches have consistent and predictable worship practices, even nonliturgical churches.¹

- 1) It is important that we teach the church leaders and congregations why we do what we do and when in worship, so they can sense the meaning of what they are doing. An essential part of that meaning involves understanding that they are in the presence of and engaged in a dialogue with God who is most holy, loving and just, and that there is a meaningful order of progression in the dialogue.
- 2) As we saw in Lesson One, the Bible permits certain freedom in our worship services. However, when we plan our worship services and make decisions as to where each part of the service should be, it is important to have a Biblical reason for its placement in a particular section of the service. Sometimes good reasons can be given for placing certain parts of worship in different places. For example, consider the following reason for placing Baptism in the Gathering to God part of worship: While Baptism is a means through which God speaks to his people, and thus is properly placed in the section, Proclaiming God's Word, it is also appropriate to celebrate Baptism earlier in the service within the section on Gathering to God due to the elements of cleansing and incorporation into the Body of Christ which are also signified by this sacrament and which are necessary for coming into God's most holy presence.
- 3) Most Protestant churches celebrate two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, especially on the Biblical basis that these are the only two sacraments Jesus commanded the church to celebrate. The denominations to which churches, or their pastors, belong, have produced liturgies for both of these services, including the specified doctrinal distinctions and rites required in each celebration, so liturgies for Baptism and the Lord's Supper will not be included in this manual, though some are referenced in Lesson Ten. The liturgies of the major historic Christian denominations contain very beautiful, thoughtful, and meaningful prayers and explanatory statements that are profound, sanctifying, spiritually uplifting, and exceedingly encouraging.
- 4) When celebrating the Lord's Supper, it is essential to include the Biblical teaching about how very important it is to do so carefully in accord with God's Word. Consider especially what the Lord says through the Apostle Paul as recorded in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32.

²⁷Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹But if we judged ourselves, we would not

¹ John Witvliet, pp. 15, 24-25.

come under judgment. ³²When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

Through the centuries the several Christian denominations, all distinct but united in Jesus Christ, have understood the serious implications of this teaching in the Apostle Paul's letter to the church congregation in Corinth. Out of love for people and caring for their protection, so they do not eat and drink judgment upon themselves, the denominations have developed ways to do so that have been called by various terms, such as "guarding the table" or "fencing the table." Some, as in the example that follows, do so in a way that supportively draws attention to and emphasizes each individual's own responsibility in this vital matter.

Immanuel Lutheran Church in Loveland, Colorado, has a helpful way to assist people in the congregation to examine themselves before partaking of the Lord's Supper in accord with the apostle Paul's admonition in this passage. During his explanation of the Biblical account of the Lord's Supper, prior to the distribution of the elements each Sunday, the pastor warmly says,

The Lord's Supper is celebrated weekly at Immanuel. If you are uncertain whether you should participate in the Lord's Supper and

partake of these elements, please ask yourself four questions: 1) Do you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior? 2) Do you know that you are sinful and in need of the Lord's forgiveness? 3) Do you believe and trust Christ's words that what we receive in the Sacrament, is not just bread and wine but in a very mysterious way that transcends our ability to fully understand, is also the very body and blood of Jesus, in, with, and under these simple elements; and 4) Will you strive, with the Holy Spirit's help and guidance, to be more Christ-like in your daily life? If so, this gift is for you.

Children and young people who have not yet been instructed in the Lord's Supper, or adults who wish simply to receive a blessing, may come forward with hands folded to indicate you would like to receive a blessing. Otherwise, please come forward with your hands open to receive the bread (please ask if you prefer a gluten-free option).²

Immanuel Lutheran Church has also put the above statement in the church bulletin. The statement, which is a model for others to use or adapt as their denomination understands the Lord Jesus' teaching about the sacrament, reads as follows:

² Pastor Glen Schlecht, Senior Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Loveland, CO, U.S.A. Here is a URL for viewing one or more of the worship services where the pastor makes this statement prior to the distribution of the elements of the Lord's Supper: <https://www.facebook.com/ImmanuelLovelandCO>. This URL contains both the classic (traditional) liturgy and the contemporary worship services that are held on Sunday mornings as well as other services and classes. The celebration of the Lord's Supper comes toward the end of the worship service.

Communion Information

Our Lord invites to His table those who 1) believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior; 2) know that they are sinful and in need of the Lord's forgiveness; 3) believe and trust Christ's words that what we receive in the Sacrament is not just bread and wine but also the very body and blood of Jesus, in, with, and under these simple elements; and 4) will strive, with the Holy Spirit's help and guidance, to be more Christ-like in their daily lives. Children and young people who have not yet been instructed in the Lord's Supper or adults who would wish simply to receive a blessing, may come forward with hands folded to indicate they would like to be blessed. Otherwise, please come forward with hands open to receive the bread.³

- Pastors in a denomination believing Jesus is using the word "is" as a metaphor and not literally, when he says, "This is my body" and "This is my blood," can rephrase the third question, e.g., "In celebrating this sacrament, do you believe Jesus is truly present with us in his Spirit [e.g., Matthew 28:20 b] as we eat this bread in remembrance of his allowing his body to be broken, and as we drink from the cup, in remembrance of his allowing his blood to be shed, remembering what he did for the complete remission of all our sins?"
- 5) I explain not only the differences in the various denominations pertaining to the Lord's Supper, but also who should be admitted to the Lord's Table (in accord with 1 Corinthians 11) in my [Essential Christianity](#) PPT on the Christian Theology page of my WordPress Website. Those slides pertaining to the Lord's Supper can be quickly located by using the Search bar or the "Find" feature under "Edit."
- 6) The Reformed Church in America (RCA) liturgy (*op cit.*) also contains help for celebrating the Lord's Supper in accord with 1 Corinthians 11 and other passages in the Bible. Most RCA churches do not celebrate the Lord's Supper each week. The denomination has a form for self-examination in a Preparatory Service the previous Sunday or on a weekday prior to the Sunday on which Holy Communion will be celebrated. It also has a provision for self-examination in the liturgy on the very day of the celebration of the Lord's Supper.
- 7) In all denominations, the pastor and the elders should also monitor who partakes of the Lord's Supper. This oversight is part of their Biblical responsibility to oversee (the original Greek word also translated "elder," one of whom is the pastor who has additional functional responsibilities, see [Essential Christianity](#) and another PowerPoint presentation on my Website, [Leadership and Administration](#)) the

³ This statement is from the Immanuel Lutheran Church bulletin on January 10, 2016.

celebration of the Lord's Supper, so it is done properly and in good order, and so those partaking are receiving the blessing the Lord Jesus Christ intended and not eating and drinking in a way whereby they bring judgment upon themselves. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32) Church discipline is always done out of love and concern for all. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

- b. At this point turn the flipchart to the page where you have written this model prior to this session. When you write the model on the flipchart before the session, do not include the God speaks, people speak, segments; write them on later as you teach the next part of this lesson as indicated below.

GATHERING TO GOD

- [God] Call to Worship (7)⁴
- [People] Psalms/Hymns/Songs (Praise) (1)
Prayer of Confession (6)
- [G] Assurance of Pardon (4)
The Law and/or Summary of the Law (9)
- [P] Psalm/Hymn/Song (Thanksgiving/Praise/Preparation for Message) (1)

PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD

- [P] Prayer for Illumination (to Understand and Obey God's Word)
- [G] Bible Reading (10) (from Lectionary readings and, if desired, another passage in addition to, not in place of, the Lectionary readings)
Sermon/Message (2)
- [P] Prayer for Blessing on the Word (a.k.a., Prayer of Application)
- [P, G] Passing the Peace
- [G] Sacraments (God's Word to us through all five senses)
Baptism (8)
Lord's Supper/Eucharist/Communion (5)

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

- [P] Confession of Faith (13)
Commitment to Obey God's Word (13)
Offering (12)
- [G] Doxology/Gloria Patri
General Prayers (11)
Psalm/Hymn/Song (Application) (1)
Nunc Dimittis

GOD'S SENDING OF US TO SERVE HIM

- [G] Benediction (3) (Use a Bible text; see Appendix A)
- [P] Lives lived in service to God throughout the week (Romans 12:1-2)

⁴ The numbers in parentheses correspond to the cards in the activity in Appendix C.

- c. Discuss the logic of the liturgy.
- 1) Read 1 Corinthians 14:40. The context of this section is chapters 11-14 on worship. In 14:40 we read that God declares his worship should be done in a fitting and orderly way. This is why the liturgy is also referred to as the order of service.
 - 2) In Isaiah 1:18 we hear God calling us to come to him and reason together.
 - 3) We are holistic beings and we bring our total selves, a cognitive and affective unity, into our conversation with God. In Galatians 5:23 we read that God declares we are to exercise the fruit of the Spirit, all of them, including in this verse, self-control. Our cognitive capability is to control our affective, emotional, expression. Both domains, cognitive and affective, are valuable and should be expressed in worship, but the latter if uncontrolled, can be disruptive, distractive, and unproductive. Very importantly: the ministry of the Word, when well-presented, and well-selected music connect with and facilitate learning and development in both domains.
 - 4) Thus, we use this understanding in our rationale pertaining to the parts of church worship. What is the logic of the liturgy?
- d. Discuss the reasons for the placement of each of the parts of worship within these four main categories of worship until the participants can sense the reasoning of the flow of the parts (or activities) of worship. Using the information in this lesson, such as statements of meaning from the third column of the chart in Appendix C, reflect on the placement of each part of service or, if time is short, those parts people want to discuss. Examples:
- 1) Psalms, hymns, and songs of praise are especially appropriate early in the service as we gather to God giving him the adoration of which only he is worthy. Contrary to much confusion today, praise is one part of worship; worship involves much more than praise. All praise is worship, but not all worship is praise, as we've seen in our study of the Bible texts.
 - 2) Indicate that the law comes **after** the assurance of pardon, because the Bible teaches that we are forgiven by God's grace not by merit we earn. We follow the law out of gratitude for God's forgiveness and the awareness he knows what is best for us. The law can also come in and as part of the Responding to God's Word, immediately after the Commitment to Obey God's Word.
 - 3) The church from Bible times has responded to God's Word by confessing our faith. We confess our faith in word and in deed.
 - Such confession is typically done with the use of the Apostle's Creed, and especially, preferably, the Nicene Creed. Biblical scholars believe that one of the earliest creeds in the church is the one the apostle Paul cites in Philippians 2:5-11.
 - Some congregations include a question and answer from their denomination's catechism in the Confession of Faith section of the RESPONDING TO GOD'S

WORD part of the liturgy. Doing so on a regular basis, edifies worshipers new to the denomination, and reminds long-time members, of the basic Biblical teaching.

- In responding to God’s Word, it is also important to include a statement of commitment to do his will and obey God, in particular in application to the passage from the Bible that has been read and explained in the sermon. Recall the practice of Israel in their worship, e.g., Exodus 24:7, Joshua 24:14-27, Nehemiah 10:28-30 ff.
- DISCUSS: How else can we facilitate the congregation’s expression of our commitment to do God’s will? List on the flipchart ideas mentioned. Include any of the following that are not mentioned in the class discussion:
 - a) Use a hymn or song, e.g., “Trust and Obey” and “Teach Me, O Lord, Your Way of Truth.”
 - b) Recite a statement printed in the bulletin or on the projection screen.
 - c) It would be helpful, especially when this concept is new to the congregation, to make the statement as a quote from the Bible, such as Exodus 24:7.
 - d) Offer a prayer, either one by the worship leader, or by silent prayers of the people, or by a bidding prayer (an ancient form of intercessory prayer where the leader requests prayers for certain concerns, one at a time, then allows a brief period of silence for the congregation to do so, and then offers a brief prayer on each subject after the congregation has done so in silence).
- 4) The Doxology, from the Greek word *doxa* (glory), is a sung expression of grateful praise to the Triune God. Also known as the Gloria Patri, from the first words in Latin, it has been used since the fourth century A. D. The words are, “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.” Following the Offering, the worshipers are praising and thanking God for the privilege and pleasure of being able to give in gratitude for God’s manifold and unending blessings.

The Doxology is one of several short songs, called canticles (> Latin, *canticulum*, little song), which are drawn from Biblical passages other than the Psalms, that are sung or said at various places in the Christian public worship liturgy. Other canticles are also expressed elsewhere in the order of service.

- 5) Other canticles are good to include. They can be said or sung, the latter is especially meaningful.
 - a) One such canticle is called the Agnus Dei (Latin: Lamb of God). Based on John the Baptist’s exclamation recorded in John 1:29, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (see also Revelation 5:6), this brief anthem is sung or said. One good place to use this historic liturgical expression is at the end of the Prayer of Confession. It is also used during the Eucharist at the time of the breaking of the bread. The words, which can be used as a litany are as follows:

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
Have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
Have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
Grant us thy peace.

- b) Another canticle sung here is called the Sanctus (Latin: holy). Since the 15th century, the church in some places has accompanied the Sanctus with the ringing of bells.⁵ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod explains its significance in these words:

If any part of the service has been recognized as providing a glimpse of heaven, it's the Sanctus: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of your glory."

This is the eternal song of the angels who hover over the throne of God in the vision of heaven that was given to Isaiah (Is. 6:1-4)⁶. Such was the splendor of their song that the very foundations of the threshold of the temple trembled at the sound.⁷

- 6) The Nunc Dimittis (Latin: now dismiss), a canticle just before the Benediction, which can either be sung or said, helps worshipers to sense and express the great peace they have just experienced with the Triune God in and through Christ Jesus, a great peace with which they now depart and reenter their life situations for the rest of the week. In Luke 2:29, the aged Simeon, with the baby Jesus in his arms, praises God at the temple saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

Placing the Nunc Dimittis here, together with the Benediction which immediately follows, is a huge blessing in which the worshipers, especially those of us who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, indeed the/our Triune God, experience a comforting peace with which we now depart and reenter our life situations for the rest of the week, life situations for some that will be seriously challenging in many ways. While these situations will vary on a continuum of seriousness, from concerning to severely painful, the believing worshipers are equipped to encounter these situations with the overarching Biblical perspective and experience of the sovereign power, steadfast love, grace, and all-sufficient help of our Triune God, with whom we have just been

⁵ The Episcopal Church, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/sanctus-the/> (Accessed 1/31/2021)

⁶ See also Revelation 4:8.

⁷ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, <https://www.lcms.org/worship/liturgy-parts#sanctus> (Accessed 1/31/2021)

meeting, who in the Benediction sends us on our way and assures us He will be with us, blessing us, and giving us peace. Good words indeed!

The Nunc Dimittis here also reinforces in the worshipers' minds that the whole service has been focused on Christ Jesus, our only hope and the source of our help. We know we are not alone; we go with God's Benediction (> Latin: *bonus*, good + *dicere*, to say: good saying) that he, together with his steadfast love and power, is with us now and forever! See Appendix A for Biblical benedictions. See also [R. C. H. Lenski's commentary on 2 Corinthians 13:14](#), one of the most often used Bible verses for the Benediction.

- 7) As was mentioned at the beginning of this manual, God has given us freedom to be flexible in the construction of the liturgies that guide us in our worship of him. Churches also place the Nunc Dimittis after the Lord's Supper, which is certainly a very appropriate and meaningful place for this blessing.
- e. Be sure to point out the dialogue between God [God/G] and the worshipers [People/P] within the four major categories of dialogue, as indicated in the model above. Beginning with the Call to Worship, ask the attendees whether this part is God speaking or the people. Then write on the flipchart the correct designation; do the same for each of the other parts of the service as in the model.
- f. Be sure to state that other worship acts can be included in each section. Just be sure there is a good Biblical reason for where they are placed.

Transitions between the Parts of Worship

6. Explain to the participants that when we lead a congregation in worship, it is important to make statements that help the people understand the meaning of the different parts of the service. These statements, called transitions, should be brief (one or two sentences) and come just before the next part of worship they are introducing. A transitional comment gives the Biblical reason for the next part of the dialogue, for why the people will be saying and doing what is coming next.
 - a. For example, when the worship leader comes to the point of the prayer of confession, it is good to say, "As we come into the presence of God who is most holy, we need to be forgiven of all that is offensive to him. Let us pray."
 - b. Another important place where a transition is needed is prior to the Offering. Given a brief explanation in the transition statement prior to the Offering, most reasonable believers will understand and be especially willing to give when they know, or are reminded, it is for the Lord's work, in particular when some of the more readily understandable mission and benevolent uses of the Offering are mentioned, and other of the more visible uses such as building improvements and compensation for the paid staff whom the Lord has called to serve him and his church. (Matthew 10:10; Luke 10:7; 1 Timothy 5:18) The explanation statements in the transition will be good for all worshipers to hear and are part of the edification dimension of worship services. A brief

prayer following this transition and prior to the Offering helps to facilitate the Holy Spirit's work in people's hearts and minds, e.g., "Dear Father, giver of every good and perfect gift, we thank you that we can give these gifts from your bounty to us. Please guide their use for the accomplishment of your purposes in Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray and offer them to you. Amen."

- c. Providing these transitional statements produces at least two good benefits:
 - 1) The congregation understands the meaning of what they are saying or doing in the next part of the service which gives them joy in their worship.
 - 2) Transitions make moving from one part to the next smoother and more pleasing.

In one of the workshops a pastor asked, "Why do we need a prayer of confession? Don't we live in a state of forgiveness in Christ?" The following response was found helpful in answering this question. While we live in a state of forgiveness in Christ, an illustration in the human realm helps us understand the importance of asking God's forgiveness in each worship service. A husband and wife live in a permanent relationship, but when one wrongs the other, it is especially satisfying to ask for and to receive the other's forgiveness. As one seminary professor has also said, "When we dispose of our garbage, it is gone, and we sense satisfying cleansing of our home; but we still have to do it again next week." The cleansing we receive from God's forgiveness through the Prayer of Confession and the Assurance of Pardon also provides vital pastoral care in relieving our guilt and renewing our love for God in our gratitude for the grace he has provided us in Jesus Christ at such great cost to himself in the most wonderful expression of love ever! In our human frailty, we need these regular cognitive reminders and the accompanying emotional uplift in our deepest internal cleansing and renewal that are provided by our confession to God and hearing his immediate assurance of forgiveness from a passage in his Word: a huge blessing! By asking God's forgiveness in our corporate worship, we show respect for his holiness, indeed, for his being Most Holy, holy, holy, holy. (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8) Further, we facilitate the opportunity for some to ask forgiveness who may not have done so, or have not done so for a long time.

7. Ask the participants to work in their small groups and assign each group one of the four main categories of worship.
 - a. Ask the groups to write a transition statement for each of the parts of worship in that category.
 - b. After most groups have finished, or just before time runs out (being sure to leave enough time in this session to work on their action plans in #8 below), ask the groups to report what they produced. Write the transitions on the flipchart as the recorder of each group states them. Discuss the transitions as time allows.

8. For any of the cognitive objectives you have not as yet observed the stated behavior, distribute file cards as needed, and ask the students to give you the stipulated responses. Be sure to ask them to sign their name on each card. Or, you can verbally ask the class, corporately in session or selected representative individuals, and/or those about whom you have a special concern, in or outside the class (especially outside and individually for those about whom you are concerned in order to avoid embarrassment and to facilitate their responses), to do the behaviors specified in the objectives. Review the instruction as needed, for any objectives that are not accomplished as you intend them to be. Doing so in class, will help those who need the remedial help and be a good memory refresher and reinforcer for those who have accomplished the objectives.

Action Plan Steps for Lesson Two

9. For the time remaining in this session, continue to develop your action plans. First individually, then in your groups of four, reflect on the following questions:
 - a. What can you do in your home church to help people sense more clearly the dialogue in which they are engaged with God in each aspect of the worship service and what each aspect means
 - 1) for them at that time?
 - 2) for them in the week ahead after they leave the sanctuary and for the future?
 - b. Do you need to make any changes in your worship service(s)?
10. If time remains allow the worship planning groups to prepare for the worship service that will be held in Lesson Six. If you don't have time in this session for the groups to work, remind them to keep proceeding on their own in order to accomplish their tasks before the fifth lesson begins. Also ask them to include any changes they need to make as a result of what they've learned in this lesson.
11. Announce that in the next lesson we'll examine the subject of Biblical principles for planning a corporate worship service, and then close this session in prayer for application.

Key General Biblical Principles for Worship Planning

Needs of the Learners:

1. Felt Needs:
 - a. See Lesson One section on felt needs.
 - b. Include here the needs the students identified in Lesson One that are applicable to the subjects in this lesson.
2. Unfelt Needs:

All the students need to learn the Biblical teaching on and how to develop and implement the following competencies:

 - a. The main guiding principles for planning a public Christian worship service.
 - b. The purpose and place of music, art, and architecture in worship and how to implement these important aspects of corporate worship.
 - c. Practical tips for implanting these aspects of worship.
 - d. The role of and how to provide hospitality in worship.
 - e. A specific Action Plan to teach and put into practice what they are learning in the church congregation(s) they serve.

Goal: This lesson will help the participants learn the main principles for planning a public corporate Christian worship service according the teaching of the Bible. They will also learn about the purpose and place of music, art, and architecture in worship as well as practical tips for implementing these aspects of worship most effectively. The importance and practice of hospitality and its role in worship will also be presented. At the conclusion of this session the participants will add to their specific Action Plan ways to implement these teachings of the Bible in their own churches.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson each participant will be able to do the following:

1. Identify and explain, verbally or in writing, at least three principles for planning Christian public worship.
2. Identify and explain, verbally or in writing, all the celebrations and seasons of the church year presented in this lesson and at least one reason for each season why it is good for the church to observe each of these seasons and their celebrations.
3. Define, verbally or in writing, what is meant by the lectionary and include at least three reasons why it is valuable for the church to use the lectionary.
4. Explain the purpose of music in corporate worship, and identify at least three practical tips for integrating music effectively in worship.
5. Explain the importance of art and architecture in worship and identify at least three practical tips for using art and architecture effectively in Christian public worship.
6. Explain the importance of hospitality in worship and state at least three valuable practices his or her church can implement that will attract people to Christ and the church and facilitate their continued attendance, worship, and membership.
7. During this lesson, each student will exhibit understanding the importance of the Biblical elements of corporate Christian worship in ways whereby the teacher will observe only positive nonverbal feedback (e.g., enthusiasm, excitement, and joy) and hear no complaints when identifying and explaining at least three principles for planning Christian public worship.

8. Add to the Action Plan for his or her home church at least one idea from this lesson that he or she wants to implement and at least one SMART step to do so.
9. Participate with others in planning a public Christian worship service and begin working on at least one aspect of that service in which he or she will lead when the service is held during Lesson Six.
10. By the end of the course, at least 75% of the class members will demonstrate their affective interest by asking at least one question or making at least one positive comment in class, or with the teacher at break times, either verbally or in writing.
11. By the next lesson, at least half of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via email, by regular mail, or on a 3 x 5 card) that they have talked with least one other person in the church(es) they serve about least one modification they want to make in the church's(es') corporate worship.
12. Within three months of the end of this course, at least 75% of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via text, via email or by regular mail) that they have implemented in their congregation's worship services at least three aspects of worship that they learned in this course.
13. Within three months of the end of this course, all the students will have begun to implement at least three elements of this lesson in their Action Plan within the congregation(s) they serve.

Materials Needed

1. The first three materials listed in Lesson One.
2. At least one 3 x 5 file card for each participant. These are always helpful for many purposes.

This lesson will take four hours to teach effectively in its entirety. If you do not have that much time, the following options are possible: (1) The lesson can be taught in two two-hour segments. (2) Some of the lengthier parts of the lesson, e.g., the section on the lectionary and the seasons of the church year, can be (translated if need be and) printed out and distributed as homework prior to the lesson, or the teacher can assign reading those sections of the lesson on the [Christian Worship](#) page of my Website. (3) The teacher can summarize the information pertaining to certain sections, before the participants begin their work in their small groups.

Introduction

1. Review: What did we learn from our previous lesson? Discuss and list responses on the flipchart.
2. Ask for brief (two minutes or less) reports on the Action Plans developed at the end of the last lesson. List them on the flipchart as they are given. Discuss the most significant items reported.
3. Ask the question, "Now that we know the Biblical foundations, meaning, structure, and components of corporate Christian worship, what key general Biblical principles should we keep in mind to guide us in planning each element of worship?" Also ask, "How do music, art and architecture, and hospitality facilitate people's connection with God and his worship?" List on the flipchart or smartboard where available the responses given and comment on them.

Key Aspects of Worship Planning

1. **Opening:** Begin the workshop with an official welcome. Read a related passage from the Bible. For assistance, see below and/or Appendix A. Offer prayer.
2. Ask this question: “We’ve been learning a lot from the Bible about what God expects of his people in their worship. What does this imply about our leadership in worship, in particular our planning of worship?” (We need to set aside a significant amount of time to carefully plan each worship service.) At this point I’d like us to consider several important aspects of planning, and they’re here included as a checklist of questions.

a. Am I preparing myself spiritually prior to planning worship for the church?

- 1) Not only the worship leader him or herself, but any others sharing in the leadership of the worship service must spend adequate time in prayer (for the Lord’s help in preparing the leader’s mind and heart to grow further in Christlikeness to be a model for others, for the Lord’s help in knowing the people’s needs, and for his help in planning to meet those needs). God requires his people to be holy and righteous (e.g., Leviticus 19:2), and their leaders must also be holy and righteous, setting an example. (Titus 2:7)
- 2) The leader should also undertake regular opportunities for continuing education and exploring resources for renewal. Such opportunities can include the following:
 - a) Attending in-service education events such as this one
 - b) Talking with other worship leaders of like mind and who are growing in Christ
 - c) Checking such organizations as the [Ministry Resource Center of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary](#).

b. Does my worship planning include the whole counsel of God? Edification is a major part of worship (cf., e.g., 1 Corinthians 14:12, 15-19), especially in the second main part of a worship service (Proclaiming God’s Word). Therefore, at least every three to four years we want to be sure we are including the main content of what God wants us to know. An excellent resource for providing this learning in worship is the lectionary.

- 1) The use of a lectionary is very helpful in planning worship services. A lectionary is a compilation of texts from the Bible for each Sunday of the church year, typically in a cycle of three years consisting of three readings for each Sunday, one from the Old Testament (OT) with an accompanying Psalm, one from the New Testament (NT) epistles, and one from one of the four accounts of the Gospel. There are several benefits for using a lectionary to plan worship services.
- 2) To begin, we should consider the background of the lectionary and the church year. Historically, the study of God’s Word led Christians from the earliest centuries to observe that the cycle of time from a Biblical perspective finds its meaning in the life, suffering, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (e.g., Galatians 4:4; Luke 24:44-49). To remember and celebrate the main aspects of

this great cosmic reality of the fulfillment of God's plan of the redemption of his creation, and in particular redeeming human beings who bear the image of God himself, church leaders gradually established seasons in the year that followed and focused on the Biblical teachings pertaining to these key aspects of Christ Jesus' life and work here on earth. These Biblically-based seasons throughout the calendar year became known as the church year. Lectionaries were known and used as early as the fourth century; major churches designed them to coordinate Bible readings on a schedule that follows the church year, a practice that has continued throughout the history of the church.

- 3) The church year magnificently brings together cognitive, affective, and behavioral edification, in a manner that facilitates the faithful's experience of joy, devotion, and worship, during which God's covenant people focus on the main message of the Triune God's Word: his plan of redemption in and through Jesus Christ, to whom the Old Testament points, and whom the New Testament explains concerning Jesus' life, especially his suffering, death, Resurrection, Ascension, Lordship, and his Second Coming. Furthermore, this yearly cycle offers periodic reminders, fresh insights, and celebrative joy into the profound and eternal meaning of what Christ Jesus came to do, is doing, and will do in his Second Coming and for eternity.
- 4) When the lectionary recycles in the fourth year, new needs of the church, corporately and individually, have emerged and previous needs have modified. The short amount of time for the sermon in the Sunday worship service does not permit everything to be said that could be said about any passage of the Bible. Further, the Holy Spirit brings new and increasingly profound understanding and applications of the texts to the pastor and the people as they read the passages for a given Sunday. The pastor can either focus on the same text as previously, or one of the other two on this current year. Thus, a wholly different sermon meeting the new or continuing needs and with new applications will be presented. The sermons never need to be repeated even though the lectionary recycles after three years.
- 5) Too many Christians do not spend enough time nurturing their faith in our Triune God; following the church year is one way to help believers in Christ to nurture their faith and mature in their relationship with Jesus Christ, e.g., preparing for worship by reading the lectionary texts during the preceding week. Churches celebrating the church year acknowledge a new depth of spirituality in their corporate worship. The church year festivities help us keep in touch with and connected to what the Lord is accomplishing, and in the context of joy, which is highly motivating for participation and the benefits of doing so.
- 6) Starting with Jesus' First Advent, the main seasons of the church year, some of which are universally celebrated throughout the global church, are as follows:
 - a) **Advent**, means coming, a period four weeks prior to Christmas, which much of the global church has celebrated since the middle of the sixth century A. D., some beginning to do so in the fifth century for five weeks, and is composed of anticipating, focusing on, and preparing for Jesus' birth—but in the large, not limited, perspective. The large perspective includes both of Jesus' advents: his

First Coming as a baby in Bethlehem, and his Second Coming for the final judgment. During Advent, the Old Testament prophecies that pertain to both of the Messiah's advents (e.g. Isaiah 11) are proclaimed, for Biblically and in Christian Theology, both advents are linked together: Christ's First Advent signifying his initiation of the end of the age and his Second Advent signifying its culmination. Thus, throughout Advent we reflect and meditate on, prepare for, and rejoice in the celebration of both of Jesus' comings, the first initiating the end of the age, which is now here but not yet in its fullness, which will occur when Jesus returns in his Second Coming.

The liturgical colors for the seasons significantly serve to visually communicate and help us remember the meaning of each particular time of the church year. The main liturgical color applying to Advent is purple, signifying and helping us concentrate on penitence for our sin, our need and preparation for the coming (Advent) of Christ the Messiah, King, Savior, and Lord. Purple combines blue (referring to royalty, signifying Jesus' Kingship) and red (referring to Jesus' shed blood, which is what he came to do).

During Advent, we also notice other colors, especially in the many lights and decorations pertaining to the coming of Christ in our Christmas celebrations. These colors also significantly represent and remind us of who Jesus is and what he came to do:

- blue signifying his royalty, kingship;
- red signifying his shed blood for the redemption of our sins, especially significant in the striking long red ribbons;
- green signifying the resultant life eternal for all who believe and do God's will, e.g., in the green circular wreaths;
- white signifying purity, victory, holiness, perfection, and celebration (cf., e.g., Revelation 3:4-6; 7:9-17; 19:11-16).

- b) **Christmas**. The term, Christmas, comes from the Middle English word, *Christemasse*, literally, Christ's mass (referring to the large assembly of people gathered to worship the Messiah, Christ Jesus), especially at this time of the year to celebrate his first coming and the beginning of the end of the age, the initiation of the culmination of God's perfect plan of redemption of his creation, especially of the crown of his creation, the human beings who bear his image. (Galatians 4:4-5) Though the exact date of Jesus' birth is unknown, and is even celebrated on different days in the global church, December 25 was chosen in order to eclipse and replace the *Natalis Solis Invicti* (Latin for the "Birth of the Invincible Sun," the pagan festival, instituted by the Roman Emperor Aurelian in A. D. 274, of the cult called *Sol Invictus*, referring to the Roman god, Sol [the Sun] at the time of the winter solstice holiday). Christians chose to point to the prophecies foreseeing the advent of the true Son and Sun of Righteousness as revealed in such Biblical texts as Isaiah 9:2; 60:1-3; Malachi 4:2; Luke 1:78-79). The term, Christmas, was first adopted in Rome around 336 A. D. For more on Christmas,

including the colors of Christmas, see my free PowerPoint presentation, [Biblical Backgrounds of Current Christmas Customs and Symbols](#), the [accompanying commentary](#), and other related resources on the [Christian Theology/Christology](#) page of my WordPress Website and on my [academic Website](#).

- c) **Christmastide** refers to the continued celebration of Jesus' birth from Christmas Day throughout the season of Christmas. There is no letdown the day after Christmas as there is for a lot of people who have put so much effort into preparing for Christmas; for Christians who celebrate Christmastide, the celebration has just begun! For some Christians, Christmastide lasts 12 days ("the 12 days of Christmas") that occur between Christmas Day and Epiphany (*op cit.*)

Other Christians view Christmastide as lasting from the vigil Mass on Christmas Eve through February 2, the 40th day after Jesus' birth when he was presented in the temple (Luke 2:22-39) as part of his mother Mary's purification in accord with the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12:2-8), thus completing the celebration of Jesus' birth and resuming regular life, as Mary was now able to do following her purification. This day is called Candlemas by many Christians, including Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Lutherans, Anglicans, and Methodists, who bring candles to their church to have them blessed and which they use the rest of the year as a symbol of Christ Jesus, the light of the world. (John 8:12) Candlemas is the day these Christians take down their Christmas decorations for this season. White is the primary liturgical color, but the other Christmas colors remain as well in decorations.

- d) **Epiphany** (> ἐπιφάνεια [*epiphaneia*] manifestation > ἐπί [*epi*] upon + φαίνω [*phainō*] bring to light), is an ancient festival from at least the second century, that proclaims Jesus' appearing to the world as the promised Savior. The church in the West has proclaimed this day, January 6, as Epiphany, the manifestation of Jesus to the world indicated by the visit of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12), who were most likely Persian Gentile priest-sages, and who, led by the Holy Spirit, brought gifts representing [who Jesus is and what he came to do](#). Since Matthew 2:11 says that [the Magi came into the house](#) and saw Jesus and Mary, rather than to [a manger \(which likely was in a cave where Jesus was born\)](#), Biblical scholars believe that it was sometime after Jesus' birth that the Magi arrived, traditionally on January 6. Thus, Epiphany is closely associated with Christmas and for many, this brings to a close the celebration of Jesus' First Advent. The church in the East associates the epiphany of the Lord with Christmas, which many celebrate on this day. Those churches who do not hold worship services each day of the week, or those who cannot worship corporately on Epiphany Day, celebrate it on the next Sunday following Epiphany. The liturgical color of the first day of Epiphany is white, as it is on the last Sunday of the Epiphany season, the last Sunday, the Sunday before Lent, which celebrates our Lord's transfiguration. Depending on the church's decision of how long to celebrate Christmastide (*op cit.*), the liturgical color between these two Sundays is white or green, the latter symbolizing the ongoing and developmental dimension of the growth of life in and through the Lord.

- e) **The Season of Epiphany** extends from January 6 and lasts until the beginning of Lent, which occurs on Ash Wednesday, the date of which (*op cit.*) varies. As Dennis Frederickson explains,

Thus, Epiphany varies in length from year to year but its meaning remains the same—the unfolding to the world of the nature and power of the Christ just born. We hear stories of Simeon and Anna perceiving the true nature of the Christ and affirming the testimony of the birth. The season also points to the development of Jesus’ self-awareness [Luke 2:52], marked by his baptism. Correspondingly, it is a time of reflection on commitment to Jesus as the one offered to fulfill human needs and longings [and God’s plan of redemption].¹

- f) **Lent** is an Anglo-Saxon word meaning “spring,” which refers to the springing forth of new life. Lent is an apt designation signifying not only the time of the calendar year in which at least part of this special season in the church year occurs, but it also signifies the most important meaning of new life, the being born again to eternal life that Jesus Christ came to make possible, which is celebrated on Easter Sunday.

Another spiritually striking similarity to the new life that emerges in nature in spring (which is part of God’s general revelation that he has built into his creation which points to him, thus leaving mankind without excuse for not believing in God [cf., Romans 1:20]) is the new life in Christ but which is eternal. We read in Romans 6:4, “We were therefore buried with him [Christ] through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” The original Greek word that the NIV translates, new, is *καινότητι* (*kainotēti*), from *καινότης* (*kainotēs*), newness. This is a special Greek word for new, which is very significant in the Greek of the New Testament and the Greek translation of the Old Testament, appearing with such terms as the new covenant, new creation, and new heaven and new earth. Related to *καινός* (*kainos*), meaning new in nature and in quality, more at essentially renewed (rather than new in time or in origin for which there is another word, *νέος* [*neos*] more at brand new), our new life in Christ is essentially and fundamentally new, but not totally or brand new. A born again Christian still has the same name, body recognizable by others, appreciation of beauty, and other characteristics, but his or her soul has been freed from spiritual death and given a new and significantly different spiritual life in Christ that is eternal; our new birth, new life, in Christ is oriented to him, rather than to the evil in the world, and, credited by faith with Christ’s righteousness (Romans 4), we are acceptable to God now and forever.

¹ Dennis F. Frederickson, “The Christian Year Among the Churches,” *The Complete Library of Christian Worship Volume 5, The Services of the Christian Year*, Robert E. Webber, Editor (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), p. 61.

A new believer has continuity with the good part of what he or she has been by God's grace, but now in Christ the new believer has an essentially new life to the core of his or her being, similar to the plant that has withered and died in the fall and raised to new (*kainotēs*) life in the spring. It has continuity with its life last year but now is significantly newly alive. (See the Apostle Paul's comparison and explanation in 1 Corinthians 15:35-58.)

Lent thus refers to a 40-day period just prior to Easter/Resurrection Day. Pertaining to Christian worship, many Christians, especially but not limited to those in liturgical churches, use these 40 days for focusing on Christ Jesus' death and what it means in their life, giving particular attention to penitence, examining our lives and reflecting on our need for forgiveness in Christ, in preparation for the highest festival of the church year, Easter. This pre-Easter season has been throughout church history, and still is, used as the final phase of preparation for adult candidates for baptism, for restoring when ready those under church discipline, and for those in an educational program preparing to join the church. Leaders in many churches invite all their members to join together during Lent for self-examination, repentance, self-denial (Matthew 16:24), prayer, fasting, and reading and meditating on God's Word.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and lasts until Easter eve, though some say until Maundy Thursday, the Thursday before Good Friday. (Maundy, from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning command, refers to Jesus' command in John 13:34-35.) Sundays, always a joyous weekly celebration of Jesus' Resurrection, historically are not considered part of Lent. Lent began in the 6th century, when Pope Gregory established a 40-day period of fasting and repentance, beginning with Ash Wednesday. He patterned this period of preparation on Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the desert. (Matthew 4:1-11) The global church has always used the events of Lent and Easter as ways to simulate walking along with Jesus in the final days leading to the climax of his mighty acts of redemption and salvation. It's an important and opportune time to draw close to God. Doing so helps believers in Christ to grow in their relationship with God throughout the year and always!

The color used throughout Lent, including Holy Week is purple. Again, purple combines blue (royalty, signifying Jesus' Kingship) and red (referring to Jesus' shed blood); at Lent purple signifies penitence and mourning as we worship, knowing what the Lord was going through in the events leading up to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. During Holy Week, the last seven days before Easter/Resurrection Day, the liturgical colors are red and black (for the somber essence of what Jesus went through for us, especially on Good Friday and Holy Saturday). For the Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday, use either white or red colors.

- g) **Easter** is a common name of the most important day in the church year; it is the day on which Christians all over the world celebrate Jesus' Resurrection from the dead, the event which changed the world most significantly and inaugurated the end of the present age, the last times (e.g., Hebrews 1:1; 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20-21).

The name, Easter, is peculiar to English-speaking countries, which is another reason, since the church is catholic, i.e., worldwide, it would be good, including most accurate, to refer to the day with the term that designates the most important event to which it refers: Resurrection Day.

The date of Easter, and other Christian festivals, was not a major concern for the first three centuries A. D., when Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire, and Christians were frequently persecuted. However, after 313 A. D., when Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity, it was possible to consider such matters and to do so openly and in corporate public worship. The first general council of the Christian church, the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., followed Constantine's position that Christianity and Judaism be totally separated, including that the celebration of Christ Jesus' Resurrection not be on the Jewish Passover, even though Jesus' suffering, death, and Resurrection occurred at Passover, the Old Testament event which *pointed to, and was fulfilled by, Jesus Christ's suffering, death, and Resurrection* (e.g., John 1:29; I Corinthians 5:7; 19:32-37; Galatians 4:4-5; 1 Peter 1:9). Thus, the Council ruled that the feast of the Resurrection be celebrated on a Sunday and never on the Jewish Passover. The Council required that the Christian celebration was to be the Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox.

The liturgical color for Easter is typically white. Gold is also used to express the supreme value of what Jesus Christ did for us and the joy he has brought us in his Resurrection, the first fruit of our own resurrection to eternal life in the new heaven and new earth. For more on Easter, see my free PowerPoint presentation, [The Biblical Significance of Easter Signs and Symbols](#), its [accompanying commentary](#), and other resources on my [academic Website](#) and on the Christology subpage of the [Christian Theology](#) page of my WordPress Website.

- h) **Eastertide** is the term of the period following Resurrection Day, the period between Easter and Pentecost (*op cit.*). This great fifty-day celebration in the church of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead began as early as the second century, according to what we know from the late second and early third century church theologian, Tertullian. It was a very important celebration, as Duke University Divinity School's Geoffrey Wainwright explains,

During the entire seven weeks of Eastertide, Christians did not kneel for prayer but rather stood in order to mark the heavenly location of believers in the risen and exalted Christ, in anticipation of the general resurrection; nor did they fast, for they were enjoying a foretaste of the heavenly banquet with the messianic bridegroom. Easter was the season of the Alleluia, a hopeful sign of the time when "we shall do nothing but praise God" (Augustine). The oldest practice of the church draws heavily on the Fourth [account of the] Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Apocalypse for scriptural readings during "the great fifty days": the followers of Christ, rejoicing in the gift of the other

Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, spread the good news of salvation and tasted the life of heaven.²

- Ascension Day is the celebration of Jesus' rising from earth to take his place at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Luke 24:49-53; Acts 1:9; Ephesians 1:17-23; 4:10) and his reign over all creation. The church has celebrated Jesus' Ascension on the 40th day after his Resurrection (Acts 1:1-11, esp. vss. 3, 9) since at least A. D. 375; the recognition of this special day possibly began even earlier that century,³ and some say as early as A. D. 68.⁴ Multiple additional texts also refer to Jesus' Ascension, e.g., John 3:13; 6:62; 20:17; Colossians 3:1; 1 Peter 3:21-22; Hebrews 4:14). Ascension Day is one of those "great fifty days" in Eastertide, between Easter/Resurrection Day and Pentecost Sunday (10 days after Ascension Day), that is celebrated in many parts of the global church. While in church history this day has not included great ceremony, it has been recognized as one fitting for especially significant recognition and celebration to honor and glorify our risen, ascended, and reigning Lord, King, and Savior, Jesus Christ. Ascension Day is either celebrated on that day, 40 days after Resurrection Day, or, in congregations who find it difficult to worship on a Thursday, on the next Sunday following the 40th day.

Jesus' Ascension assures us of many blessings that meet many human needs, which we do well to include in our worship, another reason to celebrate what he did on this greatly significant day. If time permits, ask the attendees to think about and identify some of these blessings. Depending on the size of the group and the time available, conduct this discussion either in the whole group or first in small groups followed by feedback to the whole class. Add any of the following that are not mentioned in this discussion.

- Jesus' Ascension provides the most helpful means of keeping a healthy, positive, and uplifting perspective on life. "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." (Colossians 3:1. See also the following verses.) The things of this world, seen in the light of Christ Jesus' reign at the right hand of God, frees us from the worries of this life and enables us to function most responsibly in the high and holy calling he has given us to serve him here on earth in this temporary time between now and the time we are brought into his very presence and service forever.
- We are assured we have an Advocate in the presence of the Father, which assurance is especially meaningful, helpful, and comforting when we

² Geoffrey Wainwright, "The Origins of the Christian Year," in Robert E. Webber, Editor, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship: The Services of the Christian Year*, Volume 5 (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), p. 87.

³ J. G. Davies, "Ascension Day," *A Select Liturgical Lexicon*, Ecumenical Studies in Worship No. 14 (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1965), p. 19.

⁴ "Ascension Day," <https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/common/ascension-day> (Accessed 5/18/21)

sense our unworthiness to be in the presence of and communicating with God who is most holy, albeit all love as well. Thus, we can find grace to help us in our time of need.” (1 John 2:1; Hebrews 4:13-16) In Hebrews 4:16, we read that we should approach the throne of grace with *παρρησία* (*parhrēsia*), i.e., with confidence, courage, assurance, because our Lord is right there on the throne as our Advocate at the right hand of the Father.

- Ascension Day reminds us of Jesus Christ’s simultaneous transcendence and immanence. He is in heaven on the throne reigning with the Father but is still with us, as he promised, through the Holy Spirit.

Here in this brief section, we have more than enough reasons to celebrate our Lord’s Ascension, and there are many resources for helping us do so.⁵ Professor and director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, John Witvliet, emphasizes the importance of Ascension Day with the suggestion we consider linking Ascension Day with Pentecost and making summer worship “The Season of Ascension and Pentecost,”⁶ offering ways to experience the joy of Jesus’ being with us “to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Here, again as with Christmastide, especially with our focus on the life-transforming acts of Jesus Christ, our worship of Christ Jesus is **never** an “over-and-done-with-now-back-to-normal” mentality. We are always rejoicing in and celebrating Jesus’ life, suffering, death, Resurrection, and Ascension, and all that is meant, daily (at least individually and as a family) and corporately at least weekly on Sunday, “little Easter.” As Duke University Divinity School’s Geoffrey Wainwright adds, “Christian worship is always...a celebration of Christ’s presence and an anticipation of the Lord’s return.”⁷ Some churches, e.g., the Roman Catholic Church, offer corporate worship every day and with the same focus on Jesus Christ and his mighty acts in which he fulfilled God’s plan of redemption in him. Indeed, the liturgical colors of white and gold are fitting and appropriate!

Why such rejoicing and celebrating? *The church throughout history has understood the huge significance of what Christ Jesus has done for us.* Pause to contemplate some of the many implications of his love and what he has done for you personally, and for all of us. Consider how the church by celebrating these seasons can help people. Can you understand how this special focus on Christ and what he has done can facilitate a much greater sense of peace and lack of

⁵ See, e.g., Robert F. Webber, Editor, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship: The Services of the Christian Year*, Volume 5; <https://preachingandworship.org/search/ascension%20day> (Accessed 5/17/2021); Robert De Moor, “The Descent of Ascension Day: Meeting the crowning event of the church year with more than a yawn,” <https://www.reformedworship.org/article/march-1997/descent-ascension-day-meeting-crowning-event-church-year-more-yawn> (Accessed 5/17/2021).

⁶ John D. Witvliet, “Ten Reasons to Celebrate Ascension Day,” Reformed Worship, <https://www.reformedworship.org/article/march-2015/ten-reasons-celebrate-ascension-day> (Accessed 5/18/21)

⁷ Geoffrey Wainwright, “The Origins of the Christian Year,” in Robert E. Webber, Editor, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship: The Services of the Christian Year*, Volume 5, p. 91.

anxiety in people pertaining to their relationship with God and with human beings, and how this understanding informs and motivates telling others?

- How much less fear of death and dying they would have?
- How much greater sense of self-worth and self-esteem they would have?
- How much less mental illness, fear, depression, worry, loneliness, and stress they would experience?
- How much less they would feel a need to escape the challenges of life by turning to the abuse of legal drugs, illegal drugs, alcohol, illicit sex, pornography, other addictions, and suicide?
- How much less sin and evil there would be, including abusing other people, murder, rape, robbery, theft, rioting, other violence, and cybercrimes?
- And those are just for starters!

Yes, let's eagerly use these very valuable and enjoyable seasons of the church year to help us shift our focus from our highly pressured and problem-plagued lives to not only consider but to more fully and carefully contemplate Christ Jesus, who came that we may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10) Let us reflect on the profound, impactful, and extensive effects of our Lord's life, suffering, death, Resurrection, and Ascension not only on one day of the year, but on every day in worship corporately, especially as a family, and individually! Let us use every opportunity and means we have to help God's people inform and nurture their understanding and faith in Jesus Christ.

- i) **Pentecost** is a transliteration of the Greek word, *πεντηκοστή* (*pentēkostē*), which means "fiftieth," and refers to the fiftieth day after Passover, when the Holy Spirit manifested himself in a special way in accord with Jesus' promise of the Spirit's coming on that occasion. (Acts 2:1 ff.) On that Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came in a very profoundly moving experience in which he gave special power and gifts to equip the church of Jesus Christ to effectively function on and accomplish the Great Commission given to us by the Lord. (Matthew 28:16-20) In the Anglican Church, Pentecost is also called Whitsunday, due to the custom of wearing white clothing on that special day of the church year.

Another of the edifying blessings of planning worship according to the church year, is that we have an experience of the amount of time that occurred between these key events that are datable, e.g., the time that elapsed between Resurrection Day and Ascension Day and between Ascension Day and Pentecost. The church year gives us somewhat of a sense of the timeframe of these events that the apostles and Jesus' other disciples and believers experienced, as well as a bit more of the context in which they were developing their understanding of, and beginning to prepare for, what they were called and commissioned to do.

Pentecost also refers to one of the three annual festivals to the Lord that he commanded. (Exodus 23:14) This festival is called the Feast of Weeks

(Deuteronomy 16:9-12), because it was held seven weeks, fifty days, after Passover, thus referred to in the New Testament as Pentecost; it is also called the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16), and the day of first fruits (Numbers 28:26), the festival that marked the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. This festival was the occasion that brought Jesus' apostles and other believers together on this momentous occasion described in Acts 2.

Thus, the Holy Spirit came to enable us to function in the calling and mission our Lord has given his [church, which has been in existence for over 4,000 years](#); the church was not born at Pentecost.⁸ Acts 2:1 uses a rare and important Greek word, not well translated in many new versions of the New Testament: συμπληρώω (*sumplēroō*) = fill completely, become entirely full, complete. With the outstanding New Testament Greek scholar, R.C.H. Lenski, the verse is better translated, “And when the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled.”⁹ The King James Version comes close, translating the verse (“when the day of Pentecost was fully come”), more accurately than most newer versions. Here we see the link with the rest of Scripture, in particular the immediate context in the beginning of Acts, and the entire Old Testament.

Therefore, Pentecost is not the birthday of the church, as is often said; it is not being birthed on that occasion. Rather, it is being empowered (cf. the context of the passage, e.g., Acts 1:8) and equipped, whereby Christ is strengthening his still emotionally beaten up and timid post-crucifixion disciples by sending the Holy Spirit to give his church what they needed to “get the job done” in accord with their, indeed our, calling.

Relatedly, in Ephesians 5:25 we read that “Christ loved the church...” If the church didn't begin until Pentecost, how likely is it that Paul would say Christ loved ed [Greek aorist, past tense, emphasis here mine] her?” The context of the passage indicates he is referring to an entity already in existence and not speaking in a vision of the future.

⁸ For an explanation of the origin of the church in the covenant with Abraham and confirmed in the New Testament, see my PowerPoint presentation, [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God's Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity](#).

⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Acts of the Apostles*, WORDsearch 10, p. 55.

This is another reason why pastors should make expository preaching their primary homiletical and teaching method. The inadequacy of most contemporary translations of the Bible, especially in the West, is due to their having been produced by the translation principle most used today: to simplify the text into contemporary colloquial communication, prioritizing readability over precision in translating the vitally important meaning of many of the Hebrew and Greek words in the original text. People come to worship longing to hear and understand the full meaning of God’s Word, vitally needing that understanding for their sanctification, maturity in Christ, in order to serve him most effectively, speaking the truth in love, in the high and holy calling he has given us.

Of course, it is essential that we help people read the Bible. However, in so doing, we need to inform them that some translations are closer to the original Hebrew of the Old Testament and Greek of the New Testament. Therefore, for their personal daily use, if they want to use the more readable contemporary translations, they should be encouraged to do so but also to compare the version they are reading with one of the translations (e.g., New American Standard Bible [NASB] and the King James Version [KJV]) that has focused on including words that are closer to the meaning of the original text.

Consider one more example, and this one of an especially serious and unwise translation decision by contemporary English translators. In the crucial text of John 3:16, and in related verses in John’s writing, they typically translate *monogenes*, which literally means “only begotten,” as “one and only Son” or “only Son.” The term, “only begotten,” translates the word, *monogenes*, in the original Greek, as we see in English versions such as the NASB and the KJV. “Only begotten,” unlike the modern terms such as “one and only,” means that Christ is of the same essence as the Father (John 10:30), a crucial understanding of who Jesus Christ is, that he is divine as well as human, and the one necessary to proclaim in our worship as well as in other opportunities to witness for Christ.

On the human level, including the terms with which most people think, it is possible to have an “only son” or a “one and only son,” such as a son who is adopted, but who has a different biological substance from his father and mother. This adopted only son is just as much loved, and has just as many legal rights, as a biological son or daughter, but has different DNA. Thus, pertaining to average human beings on the solely human plane, not being only begotten is of no importance at all, but pertaining to God, Christ Jesus’ being only begotten is of supreme importance. We humans in the Holy Spirit are all adopted by God (Romans 8:23), but *Jesus Christ is God’s only begotten Son*, which *signifies that he is the fully divine Second Person of the Trinity*, as well as being fully human. For more see [Essential Christianity](#).

From early church writings, e.g., Tertullian and Eusebius, Pentecost likely has been celebrated in the church since at least the beginning of the third century. Paul indicates it was a special day for Christians already in the NT. (1 Corinthians

16:8) The liturgical color of Pentecost Sunday is red, which symbolizes and points to the fire that accompanied the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. (Acts 2:3)

- j) **The Season of Pentecost**, often somewhat diminishingly called Ordinary Time or Nonfestive Time, is the longest season of the church year; it lasts from Pentecost Sunday until Advent. Some also call this season Kingdomtide, focusing on the extension and nurture of God's kingdom, specifically Christ's rule in his maturing believers' hearts and minds with the recognition that the kingdom is already here, but not yet in its fullest, which will come when Jesus returns in his Second Advent at the end of this age. Kingdomtide is certainly a better term, than the previously-mentioned two, to describe this major part of the church year, but an even more encompassing and informative term is the Season of Pentecost, for it celebrates (which is one reason why "'ordinary' time" and "nonfestive time" are not the best terms) the gift, manifestation, and constant presence of the Holy Spirit whom Christ promised to the church. The Holy Spirit is also the key agent in the extension and nurture of God's kingdom.

Since the Holy Spirit usually works quietly and without drawing attention to himself, it is good for the church to regularly take notice of his presence and work in our lives individually and in the church. We can do so by acknowledging when he came with power and with many other gifts, and that he is still with us. Some ways we can do so are by referring to this season as the Season of Pentecost; by the use of the liturgical color, green, symbolizing the eternal life in Christ that the Holy Spirit gives in [regenerating and sanctifying](#) us (1 Corinthians 12:3 ff.; Ephesians 4:11-17) and the ongoing work of God in and through the Spirit; in our personal and corporate prayers with the church throughout the year, particularly in this special season; in other references in the liturgy; and in the educational ministries of the church, including in our family worship and nurture.

Certain special days during the season of Pentecost have arisen in the historic Christian church over the centuries. The three most common and their recognition and significance follow:

- 1- Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost Sunday. With the preceding seasons focusing on Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit, to remind believers, inform visitors, and honor the Triune God, this Sunday focuses on the whole Godhead, the Trinity. Trinity Sunday began in the 10th century, and by the 14th century it was being celebrated in the church throughout the world. One significant aspect of this tradition is the use of the Athanasian Creed in worship on this day. The liturgical color is white, symbolizing purity, victory, and celebration.
- 2- All Saints Day, celebrated on November 1, or the Sunday following November 1, is an early tradition in the church to remember at corporate worship those believers in Christ, whom the Bible refers to as saints (*ἁγίων hagiōn* > ἅγιος *hagios* = holy, separated to God; [e.g., Matthew 27:52; Romans 1:7; Revelation 5:8]), who were martyred and are now with the Lord

in heaven, with the church triumphant (the term theologians use to refer to the believers in Christ, who have fought the good fight and now live in eternal glory with God. (The church triumphant is distinguished from the church militant, i.e., those of us still on earth who are fighting the good fight in the spiritual warfare against Satan, the demons, and their fallen human followers.) The saints honored on All Saints Day are those who in obedience to Jesus Christ literally laid down their lives for him in martyrdom. (John 15:12-17; 1 John 3:16-18) When the number of believers who were killed while remaining steadfast in their witness (the New Testament Greek word for which, e.g., Acts 1:8, is *μάρτυρες* *martures*, witnesses, from which the English word, martyr, is derived) for Christ became so large, a day was set apart for remembering these saints.

The church also uses this day to remember Jesus' teaching about laying down our lives for him, by denying ourselves through giving to others in need (1 John 3:16-18); by suffering insults ("character assassination"), persecution, and people falsely saying all kinds of evil against us because of our relationship with Jesus (Matthew 5:11-12); by remembering the need to even prepare for the possibility of having to lay down our lives literally as a witness for our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, to always persevere in the faith in him, and to never deny or recant our faith in the Triune God. (Acts 7:54-60)

It is still important to recognize and pray for the even larger number of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are being martyred in modern times and for their families and fellow church members. In the last one hundred years, more believers in the Lord have been killed than in all the preceding 20 centuries...combined!

The saints honored on All Saints Day now include all who are with the Lord, literally all saints, who believed in and faithfully followed Christ Jesus while here on earth in the church militant. Churches today include in particular loved ones in the faith who have died, especially in the past year. It is good to remember the faithful in Christ as a way to keep in mind the Biblical eschatological worldview, "the broad picture," so we believers remember our calling, the importance of faith and persevering in Christ, and the eternal joys ahead for those in Christ Jesus. Broadening our perspective helps to avoid the tunnel vision that often occurs when we focus on the problems and the pleasures of life here on earth and lose sight of the most important eternal verities. Broadening our perspective and including the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ also provides relief, peace, and joy. (John 16:33)

It is most important when celebrating All Saints Day, to keep the focus on Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as all worship services must do always. That focus is also what enabled the saints being remembered to persevere and overcome.

White is also the color for churches celebrating All Saints Day. The color calls to mind the purity and victory of the Lord Jesus Christ and the saints'

victory, having persevered in the power of Christ and overcome the evil in the world, and white signifies the purity the saints have in the presence of the Triune God.

Before leaving the subject of All Saints Day, it is vitally important to be alert to, recognize, and act upon the urgent needs of fellow believers throughout the world, who are suffering each day. When these needs of certain saints come to our attention throughout the year, supplication should be made for them right away in the General Prayers, the congregational prayer in each public corporate worship service, and not just wait for the annual All Saints Day.

- 3- Christ the King, a worship service focused on the kingship of Christ, is always celebrated on the last Sunday of the Season of Pentecost, just before the first Sunday of Advent and a new church year. This special day is relatively new in church history, beginning in 1925 in the Roman Catholic Church as a way to combat the growing secularization, including anti-Christ behavior, in and of the world. Since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the emphasis in worship on this day, which is now being done in many church traditions throughout the world, is on the eschatological aspect of Christ's reign as King over all his creation, thus constituting a perfect prelude to the celebration of the next season in the church year, beginning the following Sunday, Advent (*op cit.*), which always focuses on Christ's first and second advents together, his Second Coming to fulfill what he began in his First Coming. Thanks be to God for his patience! White is also the color for Christ the King, calling to mind his victory and purity and the emphasis on celebration.
- 7) Using the lectionary yields many other benefits. Some of these benefits are the following.
 - a) The lectionary follows the seasons of the church year, focusing on Christ, the main message of God's Word, and linking with the motivations of Christians at those times of the year, thereby facilitating worship of the Lord Jesus and avoiding focusing on important but secondary matters.
 - b) It clearly emphasizes the Triune character of God, revealing all three persons of the Trinity, an essential understanding for worship and for our life's calling and mission as Christians.
 - c) The wide use of the lectionary throughout the global church helps connect believers in Christ with one another in worship and in their understanding of the oneness and catholicity of the church throughout the world.
 - d) The lectionary texts, formulated in a sequence, cover the main parts of the Bible in three years, thus the whole counsel of God, and therefore helps us avoid the temptation to overemphasize and spend too much time on our favorite subjects and books of the Bible, thus neglecting vital texts and subjects the Lord wants his people know, and that we need to know, and act on in our daily lives. The

lectionary provides a good regulatory and guiding principle and discipline for exercising the freedom we have, so we don't abuse that freedom.

Importantly, for all these reasons following the lectionary is very desirable and therefore highly recommended, but not required if on occasion the need to address a specific issue or concern in the congregation arises and the lectionary texts at that time either don't apply, or they are not the most applicable passages. On such occasions, the pastor can substitute the appropriate texts and speak God's Word to that issue or concern and then return to the lectionary.

- e) It relates the NT to its OT antecedents. Many Christians fail to include the Old Testament as much as they should in worship, and some virtually avoid it altogether. The OT is vital and must be included in our worship and study for at least the following four reasons:
 - 1- The Old Testament is the Word of God. (Cf., 2 Timothy 3:16). As the NIV Study Bible note says, "The primary reference is to the OT, since some of the NT books had not even been written at this time." And, I would add that it would still be over 200 years before the early church met in the councils that canonized the NT. The OT was the Bible for the first Christians.
 - 2- The OT is still authoritative for us. (E.g., Matthew 5:17-20; 2 Timothy 3:10-17; Acts 15:1-35)
 - 3- Only by studying the OT can we understand the NT. (See, e.g., Luke 24:25-27, 44-48; most of the book of Hebrews.) Essential concepts that occur throughout Scripture, which Biblical scholars call major motifs of the Bible, such as calling, covenant, holiness, and priesthood would have either no meaning or an inaccurate meaning. (How could we make sense out of such key NT texts as 1 Peter 2:9-10? Most of the Gospel according to Matthew? Revelation?) Also important: To most fully understand the OT, read the OT in the light of the NT. The whole Bible is about Jesus Christ. The OT points to Christ; the NT explains Christ.
 - 4- Since the OT was the Bible for the first Christians, when the NT was being written, the NT authors assumed it was unnecessary to repeat the prerequisite and vital information from God when penning the NT.
 - a- How ungentle our faith and ineffective our witness for Christ if we failed to keep the Ten Commandments! Notice the harmful effects in families, in society, and throughout the world where people are not living in accord with God's Word in obedience to the Lord.
 - b- Christianity is the only religion that is based on fulfilled prophecy, announced hundreds and thousands of years previously by many different authors inspired by God, and documented historically.

- 8) Celebrating the seasons of the Christian year, with their focus on Christ, is also helpful in planning worship in several ways.
- a) The main points of the Gospel message are covered.
 - 1- Celebrating the seasons and feasts of the church year is a way the church witnesses to God's plan of salvation in Christ.
 - 2- Motivation is always a challenge in reaching people to help them grow as God would have; celebrating the traditional seasons and feasts of the church year taps into strong existing motivations.
 - b) Joint planning is facilitated among pastors, the music ministry, teachers, and others. Additional benefits of the lectionary considered above apply also to celebrating the seasons of the church year.¹⁰

c. Will the whole worship service help the people sense that they are in the presence of God who is all loving and also most holy?

- 1) What is holiness?
- a) Before mentioning this subject, write on the flipchart, overhead projector, or chalkboard two words (Positive Examples and Negative Examples, or Yes and No), leaving room beneath them to list as many as 15-20 words (cf. the chart below) so you'll have two columns of positive and negative examples. Do not mention at this time the words holy or holiness or the question above.
 - b) Under the positive heading write separate and under the negative write buddy. Then make the following explanation:

Say to the group: "We need to focus on a key concept in worship. In this session let's engage in an activity designed to help us understand this key concept better. I've identified a number of words that help us to comprehend this subject more completely, and I'll write some of these words on the (flipchart, overhead, or chalkboard) that describe the subject. Let's discuss them and arrive at the concept in the process of doing so. In this first pair, the word separate has the attributes we're concerned with and buddy does not. Now consider the following." (List them one set at a time and discuss them as indicated on the next page):

¹⁰ Lectionaries can be obtained online or in certain denominational worship books, such as *The Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America together with The Psalter*, Gerrit T. Vander Lugt, Ed. (New York: The Board of Education, Reformed Church in America, 1968), pp. 197-207). One excellent resource for obtaining all three years of the *Revised Common Lectionary*, is in *The Worship Sourcebook*, Emily R. Brink, editor and John D. Witvliet, Director, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, copublished by The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Faith Alive Christian Resources, and Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2004. Another helpful resource is Robert E. Webber, Editor, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship: The Services of the Christian Year*, Volume 5 (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993).

POSITIVE (or YES)	NEGATIVE (or NO)
separate	buddy
respect	flippant
love	hate
just	sinful
righteous	blameworthy

At this point say, “Now what do you see? What attributes do the words in the positive column have that they do not share with those in the negative column? Does anyone have an idea as to the subject we’re examining?” Allow anyone to make any guesses. If someone says holy or holiness, say, “Hold your thought for a few moments to see if you’re onto it.” Then add to the chart the following words (use the blanks for choices more familiar to your culture or subculture and/or that reflect the needs of your local church):

POSITIVE (or YES)	NEGATIVE (or NO)
awe	familiarity
pure	defiled
fear	boldness
wonder	predictability
amazement	indifference
solemnity	raucousness
superior	common
authenticity	showy
humility	arrogance

When you come to this point, ask the group if they see any patterns. Continue to present examples that illustrate the concept of holy and holiness, using as many of those in the chart below that are needed until most of the group members have an idea they think is correct.

At that point, and before you say whether they are right or not, ask them to suggest some other examples that are positive and negative. As they respond, write their examples in the blank rows on the flipchart, overhead, or chalkboard.

POSITIVE (or YES)	NEGATIVE (or NO)
genuine	hypocritical
polite	discourteous
awareness of need	overconfident
meek	impudent
self-abasement	audacious
modest	daring
unpretentious	pompous

Then ask for someone in the group to say what he or she thinks the concept is and how that person arrived at the answer. When the concept of holy/holiness is confirmed, go back over the examples and discuss them.

Conclude with this question: “Does this understanding of holy/holiness adequately describe what the Bible teaches about God’s character, the demeanor he expects of those who worship him, and the milieu of the worship service? Should any other aspects of the concept of holy/holiness be added?” If so, record what is said in the appropriate places on the chart. At this point read the following Scripture passages (Leviticus 19:2, Psalm 24:3; Isaiah 6:1-8; Habakkuk 2:20; Revelation 4 and 5) and ask: “Does anything else come to mind that should characterize ourselves and our worship services in order to please God who is most holy?” (Add any suggestions to the chart.)

Make sure the students understand that in the Bible holy and holiness involve separation from sin and immoral evil. Holy and holiness apply to both God and his people.

- **God is most holy, and he will not allow evil and sin to enter his holy, holy, holy presence.**
- **Therefore, because of his great love to the core of his being, he cleanses us who believe in and follow Christ Jesus and calls us to be holy, i.e., separate FROM evil and sin and separate TO him.**

- 2) Next, discuss (either in the group as a whole, or first in small groups then in the large group as in previous sessions) this question: “What are the implications for what we do and don’t do in our worship services in order to help people regard God’s holiness, to be holy themselves, and to worship in holiness?” List responses as they are given in the large group on the flipchart, overhead, or chalkboard. Be sure to ask them to add what has been listed to their Action Plans.
- 3) Here it would be good to take a few minutes to draw a related application pertaining to the generation of young adults, called the millennials. Researchers vary as to the precise [dates of the millennial generation](#), but it is cited to be from the mid-1980s to just before 2000 A. D. This generation places a strong emphasis on authenticity; they want to see Christians live according to what they say they believe. They want to see holy living in practice. As we read in his Word, so does God!

Katherine Turpin, professor and director of the Iliff School of Theology master of divinity program, observes that millennials “tend to be looking for older adults that are living their intentions....They’re looking for integrity.”¹¹ Rev. Scott Bailey, priest secretary to the archbishop for the Archdiocese of Denver, a millennial himself, adds another matter important to this generation, “Can someone please just answer my questions? What do Christians believe? How do I live my faith?” Pastor Stephen Redden with New Denver Church also states that millennials “want to see that faith

¹¹ Jenn Fields, “Bringing millennials back to church: Young people seeking authenticity in worship,” *The Denver Post*, reproduced in the *Reporter Herald*, December 11, 2015, p. 7A.

actually matters...They want to see that it's not just something you say—you live it.”¹²

Here we have very important applications of historic Biblical aspects of worship and contemporary concerns of young adults. **DISCUSS:** Which parts of Biblical worship must be present and emphasized to connect most effectively with these contemporary concerns and facilitate the worship and sanctification of millennials and all of God's other people?

d. Will the whole worship service be done decently and in order? (1 Corinthians 14:40)

- 1) Say to the class, “Let us turn to 1 Corinthians 14:40. As with our use of all Bible texts, we follow the standard principles of Biblical interpretation and first consider the context. What is the context of this passage?” (Lead the class to understand that the context is worship, about which Paul has been giving instruction in chapters 11-14. Regarding doing everything in a fitting and orderly way (NIV), the apostle gives specific direction in the immediately preceding verses [14:26-35; cf. esp. vss. 26, 33].)
- 2) Then say, “To honor God, who has established his creation in an orderly manner and who has built into us the capacity for reason and order, our worship must also be undertaken in this way. Does what we are planning to do in worship reflect such orderliness? This does not mean everything has to be fixed and never changed or that nothing new can ever be tried. Not at all! What it does mean is that there is a reason for all that is done and a meaningful order in the sequence of the parts of worship that edifies as well as inspires the human mind and heart. Remember that God calls us to worship, and he engages us in a reasonable dialogue with him in our worship of him.” (Cf. Isaiah 1:18)

e. Have I spent enough time in planning each element of the worship service?

- 1) All the parts of the worship service should relate to one specific theme that comes from a Bible passage, e.g., love, forgiveness, service, *all of which relate to and focus on God's redemption in and through Jesus Christ*. All the parts (e.g., hymns and songs, prayers, transitions, choral anthems, sermon) reflect that Biblical theme which follows through the whole service. In this way the worshipers learn, communicate with our Triune God on this matter, and are more inclined to serve accordingly.
- 2) People learn from hearing God's word read after careful preparation. Those who read should prepare well and read the passage clearly and loudly enough so all can hear and emphasize the words that need emphasis so the meaning of the text comes through. Give an example: read a passage from the Bible, such as Matthew 27:45-46, emphasizing the words so the group can sense how the meaning of the text is conveyed by which words are emphasized. Doing so helps the people imagine what

¹² Jenn Fields, “Bringing millennials back to church: Young people seeking authenticity in worship.”

was going on in the events being described in a given text of the Bible and so understand much more.

f. **Is each element of the worship service consistent with the following principles?** An acronym, the HEPIE principle, may help for remembering these five principles.

- 1) Is the service **H**oly? (I.e., is it distinguished from the negative parts of the secular culture and does it help people experience the most holy God's presence, love, and forgiveness in Jesus Christ? [Leviticus 11:44; Matthew 4:10; John 4:23-24])
 - **DISCUSS:** How can we plan the worship service to facilitate people's sense of being in the holy presence of God?
 - a) Stand when the Bible passages are read? In respect for God, many church congregations all over the world stand for hearing God's Word. (Cf. the bailiff in a court room commanding every one there present when the judge enters saying, "All rise!")
 - b) Stand for prayer?
 - c) Other?
- 2) Does it **E**dify and equip people for service to God? (1 Corinthians 14:12, 15-19)
 - **Discuss:** How can we plan the worship service to facilitate people's learning?
 - a) Employ brief transitional statements before the next part of worship.
 - b) Carefully prepare the sermons. (Remind the students of what they learned in the preaching module of this series.)
 - c) Other? (See also other sections of this manual.)
- 3) Is it **P**ermitted by the Bible? (1 Corinthians 6:12 [It must be noted that this passage is not in the context of teaching on corporate worship, but the principle can be extended to worship.])
 - a) Is what I'm planning Biblical? In addition to what the Bible requires in worship (which we've been examining in our previous sessions), we can also do other things if the Bible doesn't prohibit them and if they are in accord with these principles we've been discussing.
 - b) It is helpful to draw on the guidance of the historic Christian church through the centuries to see how our faithful forbearers answered such questions. In this matter John Oecolampadius (1482-1531), a Swiss Reformer, developed the principle that worship should be according to Scripture, that is in accord with Biblical principles. This position is contrary to others who have held that worship could only contain those elements found in worship in the Bible and contrary to

those who held that anything can be done if the Bible does not specifically forbid doing so.¹³

- 1- Some elements in the culture around us (e.g., a djembe drum and the dancing African worshipers do as they bring their gifts and tithes to the sanctuary chancel during the Offering, symbolizing giving them to God) may be used to glorify God and enrich our worship.
- 2- However, be sure to explain to the group the need to be careful of cultural elements that will distort or distract from the focus on covenant renewal in the celebration of Jesus' life, suffering, death, and resurrection for our redemption. Some cultural elements that become part of Christian worship services can become such strong subjects of focus and tradition that people place their security in them instead of in God, thus becoming idols, false gods! Other cultural elements in different ways take our focus from God's worship.
- 3- DISCUSS: "What examples can you give for such distortion and distraction?" If discussion is slow, ask the group to discuss this question in dyads and to list as many as come to mind in three minutes. Then ask volunteers to report, one item and one dyad at a time, what they came up with in their discussions. If they are not included in the reports of the dyads, include the following:
 - a- Do these distort or distract our attention from God and what he is saying and doing and from what he deserves from us?
 - 1} Placing the national flag, and even the Christian flag, in the chancel together with the three symbols of the Biblical means of grace (the pulpit [with the Bible communicating God's Word], the baptismal font, and the Lord's table) and the pledge of allegiance (as some congregations do)?¹⁴ When the flag is placed in the chancel, the place in Biblical architecture of the three means of grace from God in his worship, thus visually falsely assuming a fourth means of grace, is that not idolatry? One might try to argue that it is no more idolatrous than the cherubim on the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and later in the temple, the Biblical basis of the chancel in Christian church sanctuaries, or that it is no more idolatrous than the pulpit, font, and the communion table in the chancel.
 - DISCUSS: How do you answer this objection?

¹³ On this point I have drawn on the work of missionary, Rev. Harold Kallemeyn, in his article, "Why Worship?" p. 5.

¹⁴ For more on the subject of flags in the sanctuary, see my essay, "[Should Flags Be Allowed in God's Sanctuary?](#)" In order to move the flag(s) from the chancel without causing a damaging disunity and discord in the church, it is important to recognize that such action would carry with it the dynamics of an innovation, which are significant and extensive. To help implement the innovation successfully, see my essay, "[Defusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the Church.](#)"

Include any of the following not fully mentioned in the discussion:

- a) In the first place, one cannot logically (commit what in the field of logic is called the fallacy of false analogy [colloquially called comparing apples with oranges]) or Biblically draw that connection. God himself commanded the elements, including the ark of the covenant with the cherubim, (e.g., Exodus 25:10 ff.; 1 Kings 8:6 ff.) that were to be in the architectural focal point of his worship in the tabernacle and in the temple.
 - b) Secondly, the ark of the covenant and the cherubim pointed to him and his mighty acts in his plan of redemption in and through his people he has called to be holy to him with the focus on Christ, as revealed in his Word, which was in the ark of the covenant.
 - c) Thirdly, he has not commanded the flags be placed in the focal point in the sanctuary of his worship. Certainly, the national flag does not point to God and his Word and will, and there are better places for the Christian flag. If necessary, there are other places that are more Biblically acceptable, which I discuss in my essay, [“Should Flags Be Allowed in God’s Sanctuary?”](#)
- 2) The choir or praise team (especially when they don’t wear robes, a uniform, or clothes adhering to a careful standard)?
 - 3) The dress of other presenters?
 - 4) Projection screens and/or their placement?
 - 5) Musical instruments?
- b- Some of the above are always wrong to do (e.g., flags in the chancel), and others are wrong when wrongly used, e.g., immodest dress of presenters.
- 4- If people have difficulty with the concept of cultural elements and symbols interfering with the worship of God who is most holy, ask them this question: *“Why would it make a difference if this/these element(s) were eliminated (or even placed somewhere else in the church building, not in the sanctuary)?”*
- 4) Does it help **I**nspire, give joy to, and uplift the people? (Psalm 84; Romans 15:13; Philippians 4:4-9) Is there beauty in the worship service? See Appendix F.
 - 5) Does it **E**ncourage the people? (1 Corinthians 14:3, 11; Hebrews 10:25) All who come to participate in God’s public worship services have problems; many are very acute and painful, and the people come longing for hope, for wisdom and encouragement from God’s Word, to connect and communicate with him, and to receive his help. Therefore, we need to honestly ask ourselves, “Does this service I’m planning facilitate that connection?” If so, specifically, where in the service is that connection, communication, help, encouragement, and hope provided?

3. How does music contribute to the worship service?
- a. What is the Biblical basis for music in worship? (Include the following texts: Exodus 15:1-21; Psalms 145, esp. vss. 1-7; 147, 149, 150; Matthew 26:26-30; Philippians 2:6-11.
 - b. “Music...has become the catalyst for drawing people to the experience of Christ. Music is emotional, spiritual, and physical, a way to worship God with mind, body, soul, and strength. Music is corporate; it is something that all people can experience together. It is also experiential...People hear God’s word proclaimed through the songs.”¹⁵
 - c. What purpose does music accomplish in each of the four major divisions of the worship service? Consider the following passages from God’s Word:
 - 1) Ephesians 5:19: fellowship (“speaking to yourselves”)
 - 2) Ephesians 5:19: affective dimension of mentality (“making melody in your heart to the Lord”)
 - 3) Colossians 3:16: cognitive dimension of mentality, specifically edification (“teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”)¹⁶
 - d. Are there any kinds of music that hinder the purposes of the worship service?
 - **DISCUSS.** Include any of the following that are not brought out in the class discussion.
 - 1) The words of the music should be Biblically accurate. Some musical hymns and songs, both older and newer contemporary ones, contain statements contrary to Scripture.
 - 2) The words of the music should be consistent with historic Christian theology.
 - a) In the attempt to reach teenagers and young adults, beware of using secular music, even when putting Christian lyrics to that music, for just hearing the secular tunes, especially when the secular lyrics are unbiblical, can draw counterproductive associations with those familiar with that musical genre.
 - b) Even some Christian songs contain statements that either conflict with or degrade, even corrupt, sound theology.

¹⁵ Isaiah Wahome Muita, “Reformed Worship in East Africa” in *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, ed. Lukas Vischer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), p. 212.

¹⁶ M. Dean Kincaid, *A Survey of Christian Hymnology* (La Grange, IL: Kincaid Music, Inc., 1998), p. 9.

A young adult, a Christian, walked into the worship service of a church that was playing an instrumental version of a secular song in its prelude. Being well acquainted with the secular music world, and a college student majoring in communication arts and sciences, he became offended with the musical selection and immediately turned and left the church. He explained later that the secular song had no redeeming social value and was out of place in a worship service for God.

- 3) The music should be beautiful. Beautiful music honors and glorifies God, inspires his worship, and facilitates and motivates memorization for blessing throughout life. When, as people age some experience dementia, even to the point of not recognizing even loved ones, many can, and enjoy, singing their favorite hymns and songs they committed to memory long ago. What makes something beautiful? See Appendix F.
- 4) The decibel levels of the music must be controlled both for spiritual, theological, and physical reasons. Some music leaders like to play as loud as possible, and especially to increase that loudness with electronic amplification.
 - a) Spiritual reasons for controlling the volume of the music include the misguided notion that heightening and intensifying the volume will produce a sense of ecstatic euphoria that will eclipse the problems and challenges of contemporary life. Such a concept is confused, and also actually interferes, with the joy of experiencing profound communion with God. Coincidentally and unsurprisingly, this largely Evangelical felt need to engineer euphoria is emerging at the same point in history where too many contemporary Christians are producing much more literature, music, worship, and other ministries that significantly lack intellectual depth than in previous generations. No wonder when they encounter a problem, so many quickly ask, “Where is God in all this?” Where powerful profundity which provides deeply meaningful understanding that draws people to God is replaced with superficial pap, people sense something meaningful is lacking, and they turn to other devices to try to compensate.

Avoiding depth of thought is counterproductive to spiritual maturity, for several reasons, not the least of which is interfering with cognitive reflection, which requires quietude, calmness, peace, and time to think. We need to remember that God has called us to “reason together” with him (Isaiah 1:18) not to a mind-numbing affective state that is unable to process, incorporate, and apply his Word to our daily concerns and actions.

The Bible does contain passages where instruments were played loudly (e.g., 1 Chronicles 15:28), *but notice that was without deafening amplification*. Also the Hebrew word translated in Psalm 150:5 “loud cymbals” (שָׁמַעַ *shema*’) in the KJV and the NASB, but not in the NIV) is used only once in the Old Testament.¹⁷ Singing loudly does honor the Lord. In the Bible most uses of the word loud that are connected with God’s worship are referring to the human voice. As a pastor, I

¹⁷ Complete Biblical Library Hebrew-English Dictionary - Sin-Taw, שָׁמַעַ *shema*’ WORDsearch 10, 8473.

regularly remember observing the joy on the faces of people who are “singing their hearts out” in loud expressions of love for God; that kind of loudness for the Lord is acceptable and to be desired. Excessive amplification, for any other reason than to make sure everyone present can hear, is not to be desired. It is important that the people can hear all the others singing to God, not just an amplified group of presenters, whose music should facilitate, not drown out, the musical offering of the worshipers.

- b) Dangerous theological, including spiritual, problems come with the desire to intensify the volume of music, when the purpose, consciously or unconsciously, is to produce a state of euphoria, even to the point of emptying the mind. Such is the purpose, e.g., of Hinduism, the spirituality of which is seen in the popular practices of yoga, which is deceptively portrayed as a health program that even some churches thoughtlessly sponsor. Such churches try to “baptize” yoga by calling it “Christian yoga,” which is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. Hinduism’s yoga is the opposite of historic Christian theology. Christians, when confronted with this reality, often wrongly retort, “Well, we don’t include the Hindu stuff.” Then why call it yoga, which contains the Hindu meanings, especially for all informed people, and carries with it the Hindu baggage? To fail to call it what it is, is ignorant at best and a misleading and counterproductive witness. Not only does it point toward Hinduism and away from Christ, but it’s emptying the mind effect, in the attempt to connect with the monistic oneness with the universe that is characteristic of Hinduism and other Eastern mysticism, is contrary to God’s Word and extremely dangerous. Remember what Jesus said about what occurs when an evil spirit comes out of a man’s mind and comes back, finding it empty: “Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.” (Matthew 12:43-45)

Instead, God’s Word instructs us, we are to “be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18) Paul explains that filling with the Spirit comes as we “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:19-21)

- c) Physical problems with the amplification of music include loss of hearing. I remember a conversation I had back in the 1990’s with the president of a company in Chicago that had the contract to test the hearing of the city’s public school students. I said, “My guess is that you are observing that some have hearing difficulties.” He replied, “By the time many of these young people are 45, they will be deaf.” I recently talked about this matter with a young man as he installed a new refrigerator. He told me, “Yes; I’m only 22, and already my hearing is

shot.” As worship leaders, who are called to serve the Lord and his people, which includes his command to love them, we must monitor the music’s decibel levels.¹⁸

Considering these insights from God’s general revelation, of which sound science is a part, God’s special revelation strongly indicates that we must carefully monitor the decibel levels of the music we include in worship. It is not a matter of which instruments are used but how loudly they are played and amplified. As worship leaders, we are responsible for and obligated to care for God’s people. Careful scientific research shows loudness above specific decibels can harm, permanently, people’s hearing. View these findings and their applications in the light of God’s special revelation in passages such as the second part of Leviticus 19:16 which says, “Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the LORD.” Compare Jesus’ commands, e.g., where he first quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and then Leviticus 19:18: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:30) The Apostle Paul further explains the second by saying, “Love does no harm to its neighbor.” (Romans 13:10a)

Such monitoring is easily done. Decibel measuring devices can be easily and inexpensively obtained and used by the person(s) in charge of the sound system in the church worship services. To fulfill Christ’s command to love one another, we must include monitoring music’s loudness in his worship.

- e. Do the musical selections *help* the people worship God with “reverence and awe” in accord with his Word? (Hebrews 12:28-29) *Or*, does the music *hinder* the people whom God has called together, interfering with worshipping him (NIV, Greek: λατρεύομεν [*latreuomen*] we serve, we worship > λατρεύω [*latreuō*] serve, worship) in “reverence and awe?” (Hebrews 12:28-29) While the outstanding Greek scholar, R. C. H. Lenski, urges us to attach reverence and awe to χάρις (*charin*), grace, gratitude, thankfulness, in the main clause, he also provides this additional important observation:

The verb “to serve” (λατρεύω [*latreuō*]) is used repeatedly in this epistle with reference to the service and the worship which are due to God from all of us. Much may be said about this gratitude, as to why it pleases God, and why it renders all our service so acceptable to him. Yet the fact that in

¹⁸ See also, “8 ways to save your hearing,” Michael Roizen, M.D., Mehmet Oz, M.D., *Reporter-Herald*, August 3, 2014, p. 1C. “Keep ear plus in your pocket, purse, car and toolbox. Exposure to sounds louder than 85 decibels—that’s common cacophony for lawn mowers, rock concerts, video arcades and even noisy health clubs—damages the tiny hairs in your inner ear that convert sound waves into electrical signals...Wear them when running yard equipment, at sporting events, and during loud movies [and, by extension, during loud musical presentations]. You’ll still hear the dialogue.” Cf. similarly, “How Loud is your Church?” (4/28/20) by Sound Professional, Leon Sievers, who explains this reality in much more detail. He advises that “As a rule of thumb, the average listening level in a church should be **25dB** above the noise of the room. Make a measurement of the ambient room noise prior to the service. These measurements should include the noise generated by the air conditioner, local traffic, etc. Typically, if the church noise levels are under control, good listening levels are generally in the low 60dB range.” at <https://www.experiencingworship.com/articles/sound/2001-9-how-loud-is-your-church.html>. (Accessed 7/3/2021)

his wrath against ungrateful unbelief God is a consuming fire is revealed already on Sinai (v. 18); cf., 10:31. Grace and blessing so infinite; judgment so fiery—how can the readers, how can we today, waver or hesitate?¹⁹

This is a serious matter, that God is a consuming fire. (12:29) We must not disregard him.

Accordingly, at a Gospel Reformation Network conference, David B. McWilliams, Ph.D., Senior Minister of Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Lakeland, FL, presented a message titled “Reformed Doxology: Worship According to Scripture.” An article in *The Christian Post* reported that McWilliams, citing Hebrews 12:28-29 in which believers are commanded to “worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,” explained and applied the passage as follows:

“We long for a Holy Spirit-induced relish for the truth, a delight in the Triune God, a heart moved promptly and sincerely by God’s glory in our private and public worship,” the minister said.

McWilliams, who is also a former professor of theology, stressed that one of “the main principles in worship” was that it must be conducted with “reverence and awe”, which can be hampered by “casual attitudes, carnality, certain kinds of music, and even vocabulary.”

“For example, who can think that a service peppered with salsa rhythms will lead the congregation to worship God in reverence and awe?” he asked. “Or rock music. Will sentimental tunes or music that remind one of night clubs lead us to reverence and awe?”

McWilliams went on to contend that “certain forms of music, attitudes, and actions are immediately excluded from worship by the one principle that we are to worship our God in reverence and awe.”

He also listed multiple reasons as to why it was wrong for worship approaches to accommodate cultural trends, arguing that it “misrepresents God,” “devalues church culture,” “harms discipleship,” and “does not mature believers.”

Regarding true worship, the pastor emphasized that it should be like “a different universe” without the need for “smokescreens,” “movie clips,” or “changing the color of lights,” saying “style is not neutral.”

McWilliams continued this speech by making a case for hymns and the Psalter, which he described as the “the greatest tool for discipleship next to the Bible.”

¹⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Epistle to the Hebrews and The Epistle of James*, WORDsearch 10, p. 467.

“Hymnody is part of the catechesis of the church,” he asserted.

“Setting aside the Psalters and hymnbooks is just not wise. It does not lead to maturity. It also cuts God’s people adrift from church history,” McWilliams noted. “Grounding worship in culture, cultural trends, cannot give people a sense of the long and steady growth that is behind the worship of God.”

While a contemporary worship song “may say ‘God is awesome’, the Psalter and traditional hymns tells us ‘why God is awesome’,” he added.

McWilliams said that he fears young people who are “fed on a steady diet” of contemporary Christian worship and music are “not rooted in scriptural worship” and are unprepared for dealing with hard times.

“What is often the drivel they have, song in worship in times of great need will let them down and let them down hard,” he added.²⁰

That is not to say there are no profound, inspiring, and beautiful contemporary songs; there are, but they’re not numerous. Moreover, many such songs contain multiple repetitions that are designed to stimulate euphoria, but the result instead is perceived by many as a mind-numbing minimalism of meaning that repels rather than attracts and fails to edify and facilitate maturity, which is a serious flaw. (Ephesians 4:11-17) McWilliams is correct in observing that the vast majority of contemporary songs are superficial, shallow, and lack the Scriptural and theological preponderance, profundity, power, and beauty of the historic hymns of the Christian faith. Such hymns are more easily memorizable, remembered, and often sung at the end of life by people whose minds have lost the ability even to recognize loved ones and to speak, but they can still sing those classic hymns they learned and have sung since childhood, that are intertwined deep-down within the fiber of their very being, and do so with joy and enthusiasm. That is one reason why they are classic, i.e., have staying power. How many of the contemporary songs will be remembered much less used in 100 years?

Contemporary worship leaders attempt to support the practice of repetition with statements such as this one by a worship pastor:

From what I see in Revelation 4:8, that includes a lot of repetitive singing. “*Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come’*” (Revelation 4:8). So what is the deal with repetitive worship

²⁰ Milton Quintanilla, “Contemporary Worship Fails to Worship God With ‘Reverence and Awe’, Florida Pastor Argues,” *Christian Headlines*, Friday, May 7, 2021, https://www.christianheadlines.com/contributors/milton-quintanilla/contemporary-worship-fails-to-worship-god-with-reverence-and-awe-florida-pastor-argues.html?utm_source=ChristianHeadlines%20Daily&utm_campaign=Trending%20Now%20-%20ChristianHeadlines.com&utm_medium=email&utm_content=4741313&recip=547829616 (Accessed 5/10/21) See also “What’s Wrong with Our Church Praise Music? Pastor Chris Gordon, <https://agradio.org/whats-wrong-with-our-church-praise-music>, May 28, 2021. (Accessed 7/29/21)

music, anyway? Lyrical repetition is not something new: repetition has been a staple of Western church music dating back to before the Reformation, and certainly since we have been singing in Modern English, which we started doing somewhere around the year 1550.²¹

As observed in the above comments and elsewhere in this manual (use keywords such as “repetition” and “song” in the Find feature or the Search bar to locate the other aspects of this subject), the worship pastor’s argument does not refute the position in this manual or establish a sufficient rationale for repetition in contemporary music. To begin with, the words in Revelation 4:8, “never stop saying,” are not interpreted and applied. For example, is “never” to be taken literally or figuratively, meaning often but not constantly? Does “never stop saying,” mean that throughout the heaven of the intermediate state and the coming new heaven and new earth, these words will be said all the time with nothing else being said? (Unlikely) Is this an example of the literary use of hyperbole, which here is meant to emphasize the greatest amount of love, recognition, affirmation, and rejoicing in God being most holy throughout all eternity, which all of his children want to offer him? And/or, does “never stop saying” mean always, forever, being said somewhere in the new heaven and the new earth, but not necessarily always everywhere at the same time? These are just a few examples; other interpretations are possible as well, none of the soundest providing a justification of excessive and prolonged repetition of superficiality in contemporary Christian worship music.

Furthermore, as explained elsewhere herein, there is a huge difference between the repetition in Handel’s *Messiah* and in contemporary songs. A very significant difference also exists in the repetitions in the choruses of some hymns and the repetitions of the preponderance of contemporary songs, e.g., the former contain a brief refrain, after typically three or four verses, that has considerable profundity and beauty (cf. Appendix F), whereas much too often the latter consist of trite and superficial dittography repeated many times. Also, Revelation 4:8 refers to “saying” not singing. More could be said, but the preceding is sufficient to show that Revelation 4:8 is not properly used as a proof-text for the excessive, trite, and superficial repetition in contemporary songs, and certainly not for validating the semiconscious euphoria that is one of their goals, as I’ve heard stated in somewhat different words.

In sum, what should we do? First, we should avoid overcompensating, going to the opposite extreme, and rejecting all contemporary songs, which the Scripture says we should use, e.g., Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16. But the Bible doesn’t say we should use all spiritual songs that are on the market. So, second, we need to be more careful in our selection of contemporary songs, avoiding those with the negative characteristics mentioned above and elsewhere in this manual. Third, even in contemporary services, it is a moving and meaningful experience to include each week at least one of the many great classic, profound, and stirring hymns, especially, if possible, using the organ most powerfully during, but not drowning out, the singing of the hymn.

²¹ Jason Soroski, “Why Is Worship Music So Repetitive?” crosswalk.com, <https://www.crosswalk.com/church/worship/why-is-worship-music-so-repetitive.html> (Accessed 5/10/21)

- f. Use the HEPIE principle. See or review preceding Section 2. f.
 - g. Say in transition to special music that is a prayer song/sung: “Let us pray.” (As people enter a mode and posture of prayer [e.g., heads bowed; eyes closed; knees bowed; hands clasped, or raised with palms in a receiving not blessing gesture, etc. (see “[Aspects of Prayer According to God’s Word](#)”)] the song becomes a prayer for the people instead of a performance and people are not distracted by, and their minds don’t wander to, thoughts about the singer(s) and in other ways.)
 - h. Much more can be said about the importance of music pertaining to Christian corporate worship. I have written more on the [Christian Worship](#) page of my [Website](#), and, Lord willing, additional essays on this subject are forthcoming to that page. Please check it and the related pages frequently.
4. The setting of corporate worship: architecture and art
- a. Architecturally, all the physical aspects of the chancel, the worship center in the front, should symbolize our theology and what we stand for, proclaim, and teach. The furniture should draw worshipers’ focus on the three main means of God’s grace: the Word (represented by the pulpit), the baptismal font, and the Lord’s table. Many congregations have a lectern, also called an ambo, with a Bible on it, parallel with the pulpit symbolizing the Word written and spoken. It is appropriate that the worship service begin with the pastor at the font, symbolizing that only as we are baptized into Christ and washed in his blood, are we able to receive the cleansing and forgiveness of our sins that he provides and thereby approach God.



As you look at these two pictures, what do you see first and foremost in the sanctuary on the left (Calvin Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan)? What do you see first and foremost in the sanctuary on the right (Fifth Reformed Church, Grand Rapids)? The worshipers’ focus should be on the three main means of grace, and the architecture

should shape the atmosphere (ambience) of the worship service, first and foremost serving to facilitate their sense of entering into and being in the presence of the Triune God, who is essentially true love, whose love includes justice and righteousness, and who is holy, holy, holy. They need to sense the awe of being in God's presence and the clear recognition and reception of his all-sufficient grace, and to respond in God-honoring and -glorifying worship that continues into the week ahead.

- **QUESTION:** Does the focal point in our church building emphasize only the architectural symbols of the main means of grace?
- b. Art has been used in worship to convey meaning to the worshipers since the Bible. See, e.g., Exodus 26:31-37, Matthew 27:50-56, Numbers 15:37-41. Art has been used as a teaching tool since Bible times. See, e.g., Joshua 4:1-7.
 - 1) Notice the black robe and its symbolism. Geneva tabs and their symbols: the two tablets of the 10 commandments; a weekly reminder of the importance and place of the Law in our worship and our daily lives, an especially vital reminder in our time in all cultures (e.g., in the light of sexual immorality, STDs, AIDS). See Exodus 28:2. White robes symbolize purity, victory, holiness, perfection (of Christ, e.g., Revelation 3:4-6; 7:14; 19:11-16). Everything should ultimately point to Christ.
 - 2) Art is especially helpful for proclaiming and teaching God's Word to people who do not know how to read and write. It has been used in this important way since Bible times and especially in the Eastern Orthodox churches and Roman Catholic Churches who follow the Eastern Rite. In this regard, Fr. Thomas J. Loya, pastor of Annunciation of the Mother of God Byzantine Catholic Parish in Homer Glen, IL, said, "Eastern churches witness by a [strongly attractive] and overpowering beauty."²² For further information on art in worship, see the [Christian Worship](#) and [Christian Theology](#)²³ pages on my Website.
- c. Are there visual objects that distract from the central elements of worship? Works of art? Furniture? Dress of the leaders, musicians, or others? (Cf. 1 Timothy 2: 9)
- d. The outside of the building, including the landscaping, sends a message to the world, to people driving and walking by, indicating a lot about our congregation, including some of what we believe is most important. It matters greatly in such countries where this freedom is able to be practiced and enjoyed.

²² Fr. Thomas J. Loya, "Light of the East" radio program on EWTN, 8/25/13. For more on what makes something beautiful, see Appendix F.

²³ See especially the [Essential Christianity](#) PowerPoint presentation.

This section applies primarily to those regions of the world where Christians can have a public church building and safely worship there, without the high likelihood of the building being damaged and destroyed, and the people being harmed or killed, by terrorists or government personnel. In many countries, the church (the Biblical word for which always means and refers to people and never to a building) has to worship in undisclosed locations for the time being as it did in the first century A.D.. Yet the following is for all, either now for those who are free, or for planning for the future if and when the Lord changes the situation in the locations where many of his people live with severely restricted or no official religious freedom and government protection. Nevertheless, house churches can and do also have the three means of grace similarly present architecturally in their place of gathering.

- 1) Is a cross prominently displayed? (In so doing we proclaim Christ Jesus' life, suffering, death, and resurrection [especially when the cross does not portray Jesus' body still on it] for the redemption of all who truly believe. This observation is not a statement against crucifix crosses, which portray Jesus on the cross and graphically represent his great suffering for our sake, all of which is good. Nevertheless, the cross alone symbolizes that Jesus is no longer dead; he is risen and reigning with vast implications for our lives and the rest of his redeemed creation!)
- 2) Does the church building point upward to heaven? Does it have a steeple and a high-pitched, or a domed, roof? (The building may not have the awesome, overpowering, and breathtaking majesty of the great Gothic and Eastern Orthodox cathedrals and similar buildings, but even a modest reach heavenward communicates our connection with God, heaven, and the [church triumphant](#) [believers in Christ who have already died and now dwell with the Lord, cf. *op cit.*] already with him there, with whom we worship God together even now, and with whom we are looking forward with realistic hope to being together when he also calls us home. Church buildings that look more like a storefront do not architecturally express and offer such a powerful communication of hope and exceeding as well as unending joy.)



Notice how impressive and inspirational is the Roman Catholic Cathedral Church of the Assumption in Ningbo, China, in the evening as well as in the daytime, as seen in the photo on the left (L). Inspiring worship occurs inside Gothic and neo-Gothic churches, as in the historic Roman Catholic North Church in Beijing, China (R). The light and magnificent vertical lines support the liturgy and facilitate worshippers' engagement with the Lord Jesus Christ as their eyes are drawn upward to heaven and the majesty of the Triune God, who is both transcendent and immanent.

Furthermore, what do large church buildings with massive stones and arches communicate? (Include in the discussion, strength, power, stability, durability, endurance, and permanence, all pointing upward to God who is the source and protection of those lasting qualities.) Such church structures which also have history and liturgy appeal to those who want “to be connected to something bigger than themselves,” observes Elisabeth Nesbit Sbanotto, professor of counseling at Denver Seminary, who does consulting work in intergenerational management and ministry.²⁴

- 3) At the same time, we must always remember that context significantly interconnects with church worship and architecture. In many places throughout the world, our brothers and sisters in Christ must meet secretly in homes and in other locations, due to dangers from those hostile toward Christ and his followers, such as from government authorities, people in other religions who are opposed to the Lord and his believers, and those from secular orientations who are anti-Christ and non-Christians. In such contexts, our fellow Christians must meet in humble settings that lack visible facilities which facilitate worship, but the Holy Spirit more than makes up for these worshippers' sense of awe in the presence of the Triune God in his worship. The same is true for new church plants that must begin in humble settings. Architecturally

²⁴ Jenn Fields, “Bringing millennials back to church: Young people seeking authenticity in worship.”

aesthetic buildings for these congregations may be possible in times to come, but in the light of the above, such possibilities can be a consideration for future planning when circumstances permit. Also, some people are more inclined to a church building that is more commonplace and smaller. It is good that there are several options from which to choose.

- 4) Are the building and grounds kept in pleasing appearance? (Doing so tells people that our faith in Christ Jesus is important and that we care about important matters, including providing a welcoming and comfortable place for them to spend time, and that we are good stewards. People know that the expenditure of money is one of the most significant indications of what human beings value most. When they see a significant amount of money put into buildings and property that point to the Triune God, they receive an important message.)

- 5) Is it readily observable that there are easily accessible places to park? In the business world, the term used for this crucial matter is “surplus parking.” Businesses place a high priority on providing and advertising that they have excess parking, for they know that if people do not readily observe a place to park, they will drive on by

without stopping; they don’t want to waste their time with long time-taking searches for a parking spot. They want to see empty parking spaces. Furthermore, parking spaces have to be of a sufficient size to make parking and exiting and reentering the car easy and that will protect their large investment in their vehicle from damage by other people as they park and leave and reenter their car, truck, or van.

This concern is especially prevalent where people travel mostly by their personal or family car. In many places in the world, especially in heavily populated cities, where transportation is by bicycle or public transit, this matter about parking is less of a concern.

Of course, it can be said, “What’s more important, being there to worship God or worrying about a mark on your car?” From a mature Christian point of view, the worship of God is infinitely more important, but since God has called us to reach out to all people, including those with no faith and those whose faith is not well-developed, who are in the early stages of [sanctification](#) (growth in Christ-likeness), and who do worry about their car, we need to take them into account in our worship planning in order to facilitate their visiting our congregation and giving us the opportunity to help them know about, relate to, and worship God.

- 6) Much more can be said about the importance of art and architecture pertaining to Christian corporate worship. I have written more on the [Christian Worship](#) page of my [Website](#), and, Lord willing, additional essays on this subject are forthcoming to that page. Please check it and the related pages frequently.

5. Making corporate worship hospitable

- a. What is the meaning of the word hospitable and its derivatives, e.g., hospitality?

- 1) Do the following activity to help the group further grasp the meaning of hospitality and some of its applications.
 - Before mentioning this subject, write on the flipchart two words (Positive Examples and Negative Examples, or Yes and No), leaving room beneath them to list as many as 15-20 words (cf. the chart below) so you'll have two columns of positive and negative examples. Do not mention at this time the words hospitality, hospitable, or the question above.

- 2) Say the following: "I'd like us to now consider another very important aspect of worship and the environment or milieu before, during, and after worship."
 - Right now, let's engage in another concept attainment activity designed to facilitate our understanding of this key concept more fully. I've identified a number of words that help us to more completely comprehend this subject, and I'll write on the flipchart some of these words, one positive example and one negative example at a time, that describe the subject. Let's discuss them and arrive at the concept in the process of doing so. In this first pair, the word include has the attributes we're concerned with and exclude does not. Now consider the following (list them and discuss them as indicated below):

POSITIVE (or YES)	NEGATIVE (or NO)
Include	exclude
Respect	disregard
Love	rude
Warm	cool
Welcoming	ignoring

At this point say, "Now what do you see? What attributes do the words in the positive column have that they do not share with those in the negative column? Does anyone have an idea as to the subject we're examining?" Allow anyone to make any guesses. If someone says hospitality or hospitableness, say, "Hold your thought for a few moments to see if you're onto it." Then add to the chart the following words, one positive example and one negative example at a time. (Again, invite your students to use the blanks for choices more familiar to your culture or subculture and/or that reflect the needs of your local church):

POSITIVE (or YES)	NEGATIVE (or NO)
care	inattentiveness
concern for	disinterestedness
interest	uncaring
sensitive	oblivious
smiling	frowning
other-centered	self-centered
giving	receiving

When you come to this point, ask the group if they see any patterns. Continue to present examples that illustrate the concept of hospitality (without mentioning that word), using as many of those in the chart below that are needed until most of the group members have an idea they think is correct.

At that point, and before you say whether they are right or not, ask them to suggest some other examples that are positive and negative. As they respond, write their examples in the blank rows on the flipchart, overhead, or chalkboard.

POSITIVE (or YES)	NEGATIVE (or NO)
inviting	unpleasant
genial	ungenial
enjoyable	disappointing
clean	dirty
attractive	unattractive

Then ask for someone in the group to say what he or she thinks the concept is and how that person arrived at the answer. When the concept of hospitality is confirmed, go back over the examples and discuss them.

➤ **DISCUSS:**

- a) Does this understanding of hospitality adequately describe what the Bible teaches about God’s character, the demeanor he expects of those who worship him, and the milieu of the worship service?
- b) Should any other aspects of the concept of hospitality be added? If so, record what is said in the appropriate places on the chart. At this point read the following Scripture passages: Romans 12:9-21; 3 John 5-12; Acts 18:26; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:1-8; 1 Peter 4:7-11.
- c) Does anything else come to mind that should characterize ourselves and our worship services in order to please God? (Add any suggestions to the chart.)
 - 1- One of the first, most visible, and lasting evidences of a congregation’s hospitality is consideration for facilitating everyone’s entrance to the church building, including elderly and disabled people, who have difficulty with steps. Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan has constructed a ramp from street level to the entryway of the church building as seen here:



A Greek Orthodox church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which carefully practices guarding the Lord's Table (cf., e.g., 1 Corinthians 11:27-32) by offering the Eucharist only to members in good standing, yet well demonstrates hospitality for visitors remaining seated and not going forward to receive the elements of the sacrament. A loaf of regular bread and a bottle of water, thus clearly not the Eucharist, are brought to each person seated with a warm greeting and invitation to partake of a piece of the bread so as to not feel rejected or treated as an outsider but to feel welcome, appreciated, and indeed, loved. The others with me and I, truly did feel welcome, appreciated, and loved. We also respected the church for their excellent balancing of protection of the Lord's Supper and their members while at the same time providing a loving hospitality for all in attendance in God's worship.

- 2- Include also for example, when the congregation is asked to stand, the pastor says words like, "For all who are able, let us stand to hear God's Word," thus helping those unable to stand to comfortably remain seated and to feel welcome to do so.
 - 3- Here is another good example of hospitality.
- b. Do all four main parts of the worship service help people sense God's hospitality toward them?
- 1) GATHERING: E.g., God's welcoming Call to Worship? His loving Assurance of Pardon?
 - 2) WORD: E.g., his love, even and especially in his requirement of justice?

- 3) RESPONSE: E.g., his people warmed and moved by his love committing to obeying his Word?
 - 4) SENDING: E.g., God's gracious Benediction that he will go with his people into their service and help them fulfill their/our covenant obligations?
- c. DISCUSS: Do we do anything when we meet for worship that would make an outsider feel unwelcome? Ask recent new members, older members, and current attendees who are not yet members why they are leaving in an exit interview with those who leave your congregation.
- d. Art and architecture help draw people into a church building, but careful research indicates that the number one reason people join a church is if they feel warmly welcome and comfortable in that congregation. The congregation is viewed as friendly, hospitable.
- DISCUSS the following three questions. Divide into groups to do so, and give one question to each group. At least two good ways to conduct these discussions would be to use the existing groups from previous sessions, or to let the members select which group they would like to join based on the subject on which that group will be focusing, i.e., the first, second, or third question. If you choose the latter approach, and only one person chooses one of the questions, do that question in the large group following this activity. Allow 10 minutes for the small group discussions, then ask them to reconvene in the large group. Ask the groups to report what they discussed, one question at a time. (If more than one group discussed a question, ask the recorder of the first group to mention only one point before going to another group's recorder [and then back and forth], so one group doesn't mention all that another group came up with, leaving the other group[s] with nothing to say.) Make sure the points below are mentioned in the large group. If the points listed below under each question are not made by the small groups, add them after they have all reported.
- 1) Question #1: What can we do to make all people (members and nonmembers) feel welcome, cared for, and loved?
 - a) Pray ahead of time for all who will attend.
 - b) Love all people. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7)
 - c) When singing the Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in church worship in multicultural communities, sing at least one of the verses in the language of the next largest minority group. Do the same for another minority group of sufficient number in attendance. Print the verse(s) of the other language(s) in the bulletin.
 - 1- Such translations could also be done for other parts of the service, such as in the Responding to God's Word where the congregation expresses its Commitment to Obey God's Word and the Nunc dimittis (*op cit.*) if used.
 - 2- Doing so, not only helps all people feel welcome and part of the covenant community, and this church in particular, but also emphasizes the catholic (global, universal) nature of the church, and the local congregation's

connection with the rest of the church militant (Ephesians 6:10-18) as well as the church triumphant in heaven (Revelation 5:6-14).

- d) Present a well-prepared worship service with careful attention to details.
- e) Select members to help, e.g., greeters, ushers, helpers (people standing by sensitive to and looking for anyone who has any need and who will give a warm offer to assist when such a need arises). Select such people who exhibit these gifts and characteristics, and provide training for them to function well in worship settings.
- f) Make sure we usually use words people understand, and define unfamiliar words when we must use them. Once defining them, use them frequently for a while and then return to them periodically.
- g) Never make someone the victim of humor.
- h) Maintain eye contact as much as possible.
- i) Smile sincerely and grin whenever appropriate.
- j) Use warm gestures whenever appropriate, e.g., an open hand.
- k) Provide comfortable seating. One parishioner told me that the deciding factor in his and his wife's joining their church was the comfort of the seating. He has had back problems, and he needs to be careful how he sits. If he has back pain during the worship service, he won't return. Even if he did, he wouldn't be able to pay attention, and it would have interfered with his worship.
 - Emphasize to the congregation that in God's sanctuary anyone may sit anywhere. Remember that the need to belong is one of the most important of human needs, and many people sense that belonging need being met by being able to sit in the same place they usually do, e.g., at the dining table at home: "That is 'my place.'" This is one reason why many want to sit at the same place they always do in worship and why one church member, who came to the sanctuary and found a visitor sitting in his place, unkindly and inhospitably told the visitor, "That's my seat." The visitor did not return. Remind people that we all belong to God, and he meets all our needs no matter where we sit.
- l) During the flu season and epidemics, provide plentiful hand cleaners, sterilization, and other accommodations to help people be at ease, cared for, and to focus on God and his Word.
- m) Help anyone next to you to find his or her place in the Bible and liturgy.
- n) If you know the language of a visitor who doesn't speak the language being used in the worship service, ask him or her if he or she would like you to translate. Some may decline your offer, but many appreciate the offer.

- o) Help people feel at home.
- 2) Question #2: How do we make worship hospitable for children?
 - a) Invite families, especially those with small children, to sit at the front of the sanctuary so the children can see and participate more easily and meaningfully. Here is a picture of how one church has hospitably accommodated young children and their parents:



The following picture, taken during the offertory, and the accompanying video, show the special place in the front of the sanctuary for children during [worship at the Chikuluti CCAP](#) church in Lilongwe, Malawi. The children are between the chancel and the first row, where they have a close view of all that is occurring and can participate in all parts of the worship service in that location. They are also permitted to move around during the service, which is close to three hours.



- b) Publicly announce in print in the Sunday bulletin and from the pulpit, that throughout the Bible and church history to this day, children have been part of the main worship services of the church, and that it is permissible for children to move around and, if needed, that parents attend to their needs, even coming and going with them in and out of the sanctuary as necessary.
- c) Offer a children's sermon, during which the children come forward to the front of the chancel and sit together. Sometimes include an activity, such as acting out the Bible story that is the basis of the sermon, which also relates to the sermon the pastor will deliver. If your church has Internet access and projection equipment, one of the passages that the pastor is teaching and preaching on that day can be viewed using [The Visual Bible](#), for example [the Gospel according to John](#).
- d) Ask an older child to read one of the texts in God's Word that is one of the bases for the day's worship service, either/and the Old Testament passage, the passage from the New Testament epistles, and the text from one of the four accounts of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (Whether or not your congregation uses the lectionary passages for each week, it is always important to read at least one passage from the Old Testament and at least one from the New Testament.) As with teen and adult readers, provide training in the public reading of the Scriptures, including prior preparation; emphasizing key words, especially with the emotion that the Bible writer and/or the person in the Scripture experienced (e.g., Christ in his agonizing utterances of the seven last words from the cross); and, if more than one passage is read by the same person, waiting long enough for the congregation to look up the next passage before beginning to read aloud. Before reading, offer a brief introduction to the text while the people are locating the passage in their Bibles. The Scripture readings can be on a projection screen also for those who don't have a Bible with them, but encouraging people to bring their own Bibles enables young and older people to take notes in their own Bible.

- e) Provide activities, e.g., a special worship bulletin, for the children to use during the service, especially the sermon, with a space for the children to take notes. The bulletin can include several child appropriate activities related to the theme of the service, i.e., the Bible text on which the service and the sermon in particular are based, so, e.g., the children can draw or color a picture related to the text and/or what they hear the pastor saying. Volunteers in the church can make their own children's bulletins or use printed resources. (See for example those on <http://libguides.calvin.edu/mrc>.)
 - f) See much more in Lesson Seven below on intergenerational worship.
- 3) Question #3: How do we make worship hospitable for people with disabilities?
- a) For those with poor vision: text materials in large print whenever possible.
 - b) For those hard of hearing: space for them to sit near the front; use of signing; use of technology whenever possible (e.g., "induction loop" systems that transmit directly to hearing aids with telecoils [T-coils], cf. <http://www.hearingloop.org/>).
 - c) For those who have difficulty walking or who must be in a wheelchair, a scooter, or carried: elimination of all steps as much as possible from the driveway to the front of the sanctuary, as shown and discussed above; space for them to be in the front if they wish; greeting and caring for them as with anyone else. (For many other ideas: <http://libguides.calvin.edu/mrc>.)
6. If time remains allow the worship planning groups to prepare for the worship service that will be held in Lesson Six. If you don't have time in this session for the groups to work, remind them to keep proceeding on their own in order to accomplish their tasks before the fifth lesson begins. Also ask them to include any changes they need to make as a result of what they've learned in this lesson.
7. For any of the cognitive objectives you have not as yet observed the stated behavior, distribute file cards as needed, and ask the students to give you the stipulated responses. Be sure to ask them to sign their name on each card. Or, you can verbally ask the class, corporately in session or selected representative individuals, and/or those about whom you have a special concern, in or outside the class (especially outside and individually for those about whom you are concerned in order to avoid embarrassment and to facilitate their responses), to do the behaviors specified in the objectives. Review the instruction as needed, for any objectives that are not accomplished as you intend them to be. Doing so in class, will help those who need the remedial help and be a good memory refresher and reinforcer for those who have accomplished the objectives.
8. Continue work on the Action Plan: In the light of today's lesson, what do I need to do at home?
9. Offer a closing prayer for God's guidance to apply what has been learned in this lesson.

Biblical Theological Principles for Planning a Corporate Worship Service

Needs of the Learners:

1. Felt Needs:

- a. See Lesson One section on felt needs.
- b. Include here the needs the students identified in Lesson One that are applicable to the subjects in this lesson.

2. Unfelt Needs:

All the students need to learn the Biblical teaching on and how to develop and implement the following competencies:

- a. The meaning of the six main heads of doctrine throughout the Bible, and the Biblical bases for all six, which are taught in historic Christian systematic theology.
- b. The logical order of these doctrines and how they inform the planning of the most meaningful worship that honors our Triune God, blesses his people, and accomplishes his purposes.
- c. How these six Biblical doctrines inform the logic of the liturgy, including the placement of these parts of worship, why each part occurs where it does in the worship service.
- d. A specific Action Plan to teach and put into place what they are learning in the church congregation(s) they serve.

Goal: A study of God's Word reveals six main themes or doctrines throughout the whole Bible. All church denominations that adhere to the Bible as their ultimate authority, also maintain these six doctrines that are the essence of historic Christian systematic theology. Some denominations have them in a different order, and some interpret certain Biblical texts differently (e.g., those pertaining to the meaning of the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper) but all subscribe to each of these doctrines in their statements of faith. A study of worship in the Scriptures reveals all six themes being expressed in God's worship. This lesson will help the participants learn all six of these doctrines, which for millennia the church has taught in a systematic order and framework, and their implications for planning a public corporate Christian worship service as seen in God's Word. The doctrines are key means for providing the edification and order in worship that is emphasized in the Scriptures, e.g., by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:3, 12, 26, 40. At the conclusion of this session the participants will add to their specific Action Plan ways to implement these teachings of the Bible in their own churches.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson each participant will be able to do the following:

1. Identify and explain, verbally or in writing, all six theological doctrines in their historic systematic order as presented in this lesson, including the meaning and significance of each in Christian corporate worship and at least one reason why each is an essential principle for planning Christian public worship.
2. Explain, verbally or in writing, at least one way each of the six Biblical doctrines are present in, and contribute to, people's corporate worship of our Triune God.
3. During this lesson, the teacher will observe only positive nonverbal feedback (e.g., enthusiasm, excitement, and joy) and hear no complaints when identifying and explaining the

meaning, significance, and placement of the six doctrinal principles for planning Christian public worship.

4. Add to the Action Plan for his or her home church at least one idea from this lesson that he or she wants to implement and at least one SMART step to do so.
5. Participate with others in planning a public Christian worship service and begin working on at least one aspect of that service in which he or she will lead when the service is held during Lesson Six.
6. By the end of the course, at least 75% of the class members will demonstrate their affective interest by asking at least one question or making at least one positive comment in class, or with the teacher at break times, either verbally or in writing.
7. By the end of this course, at least 75% of the class will report to the teacher, verbally or in writing,
 - a. that they feel more confident in explaining to others the theological parts of Christian corporate worship, their meaning, and the logic of the liturgy,
 - b. and that they feel more motivated and able to implement needed changes in the worship practices of their congregation.
8. By the next lesson, at least half of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via email, by regular mail, or on a 3 x 5 card) that they have talked with least one other person in the church(es) they serve about least one modification they want to make in the church's(es') corporate worship.
9. Within three months of the end of this course, at least 75% of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via text, via email or by regular mail) that they have implemented in their congregation's worship services at least three aspects of worship that they learned in this course.
10. Within three months of the end of this course, all the students will have begun to implement at least three elements of their Action Plan pertaining to this lesson within the congregation(s) they serve.

Materials Needed

1. The first three materials listed in Lesson One.
2. At least one 3 x 5 file card for each participant. These are always helpful for many purposes.

Introduction

1. Review: What did we learn from our previous lesson? Discuss and list responses on the flipchart.
2. Ask for brief (two minutes or less) reports on the Action Plans developed at the end of the last lesson. List them on the flipchart as they are given. Discuss the most promising.
3. This lesson can be taught in two hours. Ideally, however, three hours would be more helpful.
4. Ask the question, "Now that we understand the structure of worship services, what does the Bible say about the content of our worship?"

- Explain that this lesson will help us understand what the Bible teaches about the subject matter of what we say and do in the parts of worship we studied in the first two lessons and about principles for planning worship.

Biblical Principles in Worship

1. Opening: Welcome the class and offer prayer. Explain that in Nehemiah 8-10, we see in one passage a great summary of the Biblical basis and principles for the worship of God's people.
 - a. Ask the participants to return to their groups of four. Read this passage as a large group, either individually in silence or aloud in the group as a whole. If reading it aloud, ask several people who read well to take turns by paragraph. **Before you begin reading**, offer this advance organizer. Ask the attendees to listen for the following:
 - 1) the verses where the people are Gathering to God, hearing the Proclaiming of God's Word, Responding to God, Receiving God's Sending, and
 - 2) what the passage is saying about the following: (Put these questions on the flipchart, leaving space to write between them.) Another option: Assign each small group one of these six subjects, and ask them to list what the passage is saying for their group's subject while the passage is being read.
 - a) God,
 - b) the people's disobedience,
 - c) redemption,
 - d) edification (equipping) of the people,
 - e) the people's response, and
 - f) the hope that is offered them.
 - b. After the reading, ask the groups to discuss the answers to the above questions.
 - c. While the attendees remain in their small groups, ask them to report their findings to the large group. As they do, record the information on the flipchart. Add to each of the six subject categories any of the following information that is not mentioned by the groups:
 - 1) God is honored: 9:5-15, 17-25, 27, 28, 33-35
 - 2) The people's disobedience and forgiveness: 9:16-17, 26-27, 28, 29, 30, 33-35
 - 3) Redemption: 10:34-36 (See also Exodus 13:13.)
 - 4) Edification of the people: 9:3, 20, 30

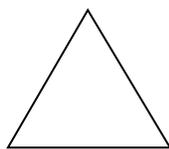
- 5) The people's response: 9:38-10:39 (Notice 10:29 where the people renew their covenant obligations.)
 - 6) The hope that is offered: 9:5-7, 17, 27-29
2. Notice also the review of God's plan of salvation in 9:6-31, which is a regular part of worship in the Bible, are not always as lengthy as in this Nehemiah passage. Worship in the Bible typically contains a review of God's mighty acts in and through history, e.g., Joshua 24; 1 Chronicles 16; Ezra 9; Psalm 105; Luke 4; 24:13-53; Acts 2; 13:13-52.
- DISCUSS: How can we do this review in our worship services?
3. In the New Testament God revealed more of himself and his plan of salvation that was incorporated into the worship of the early church. Examine each of these six subjects more closely using the accompanying additional texts from both testaments. Assign one or two of the six subjects to each group. After the groups have finished their assignments, ask a representative of each group to report that group's answers to the questions. Write the questions on the flipchart. These six subjects can be expressed as primary principles to help us plan our worship services.

HONOR GOD

- a. Read, or ask others to read, Isaiah 61:1; Matthew 28:19; Leviticus 19:2; Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8; 1 John 4:16.

1) Questions:

- a) Specifically, whom are we worshipping in this worship service? Is it clear that we are worshipping the Triune God? Where in the service is he referred to as Triune, and in a way that everyone in attendance is clear that we are worshipping the Triune God and not just any god.
 - b) What is the central idea and what key words describe God in each of these texts? Write down at least one of those key words. (What do these texts tell us about who God is, what he is like, and what he expects of us?)
 - c) Is this key understanding part of the worship in your church? Give an example.
 - d) Is the Triune God honored? In what ways? In the language we use to address him? In the musical selections? With a Prayer of Confession and a Commitment to Obey God's Word?
- 2) Add any of the information below that the group did not report on God. Draw the following graphic on the flipchart as you make the explanations.



- a) The triangle symbolizes God, who has revealed himself as three persons sharing one substance, whose presence we are entering, whom we are approaching in worship, whose Word we have come to hear, and to whom we are responding in faith and obedience as he sends us back into the world to serve him.
- b) We first notice that God is Triune, which is taught rudimentarily more generally in the Old Testament (e.g., in Isaiah 61:1) and in a more specific and detailed manner in the New Testament (e.g., Matthew 28:19).
 - 1- Point out to the worship leaders that it is good when beginning to offer prayer to take several moments to contemplate and acknowledge God, who he is and what he is like: his being our great heavenly Father; only begotten Son, Christ Jesus; and Holy Spirit, Three-in-One, who loves us, is listening to us, and is ready to communicate with us in a dialogue. It is good for us to do so personally, before we lead in prayer, as well as in the beginning of the prayer we are leading the people to pray. It is important to refer in each worship service to God's Triune character (e.g., in an opening prayer, "Dear God, Father; only begotten Son, Christ Jesus; and Holy Spirit, Three-in-One...," then thereafter in the service as, "Dear Triune God...," and in the sermon) as a reminder to believers, and a testimony to non-Christian visitors, as to whom we are worshiping.
 - 2- One way you can teach this aspect of God's being is by an illustration. God, who is the Creator and Owner of the universe, has put many examples of spiritual realities in the physical realm (cf. e.g., Psalm 19 and Romans 1:18-20). One of the most helpful examples of the Trinity is the sun. The sun constantly contains three distinct but, at the same time, combined elements: the ball of fire, light, and heat. One is never present without the other two, and the three distinct elements all constitute one luminary. In the example the ball of fire represents the Father; the light represents the Son (the Light of the world); and the heat represents the Holy Spirit. These three parts of the sun are a constant testimony that it is reasonable to believe something can have three distinct elements that share one substance simultaneously.¹
 - 3- God is love, but being true love, his love is also just and righteous. To enter the presence of God, who is most holy (the meaning of repeating the word holy three times, Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8), causes awe to erupt from the depths of our very being! (Leviticus 19:2; Psalm 24:3-4; 1 John 1:5-10)

¹ Albertus Pieters, *The Facts and Mysteries of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1933), pp. 188-189. For further explanation and use of this analogy, see my essay, "[Who is God, and what is he like? Part 1: What is the Trinity?](#)" on the Christian Theology page of my [general Website](#).

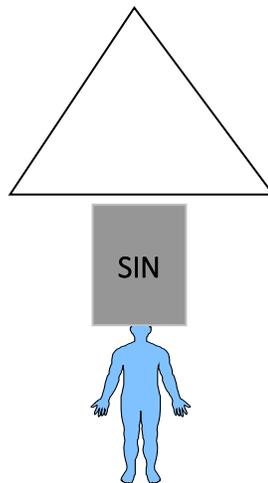
- 4- What are the implications for your worship service in your home church?
(Ask the groups to make notes for their Action Plans.)
- Include, e.g., since God is most holy, what can we do to help people sense they are in the presence of God, who is most holy? One way: Before a Prayer of Confession early in the worship service, the leader should say transitional words to this effect: “As we enter the presence of God, who is most holy, it is necessary that we be forgiven of all that offends him and interferes with our relationship with him. Let us pray.”

ASSURE FORGIVENESS

b. Read, or ask others to read, Psalm 51:1-5; Romans 3:23; Jeremiah 13:23; 17:9.

1) Questions:

- a) What is the central idea and what key words describe the human race in each text? Write down at least one of those key words. (What do these texts tell us about humankind and the condition in which we live?)
 - b) Is this key understanding part of the worship in your church? Give an example.
- 2) Add any of the information below that the group did not report on human nature and the human condition. Draw the following graphics on the flipchart as you make the explanations.



- 3) Humankind is separated from God by sin. Sin has thoroughly corrupted human nature; even those of us who have been born again (who have received the new birth from the Holy Spirit and are reconciled with God), still struggle with the effects of our sinful nature. (Romans 7:14-25)

Sin is serious. Our sinfulness is an especially grave condition in the light of God being not only holy but holy, holy, holy. Without this understanding, people have difficulty understanding and appreciating the need for forgiveness and the meaning of

what Jesus Christ did for us and responding appropriately in gratitude to God, including living lives of obedience to and thanksgiving for him.

An outstanding New Testament scholar, Leon Morris, in an article on “Propitiation” observed that the Greek word, ἱλαστήριον (*hilasterion*), most accurately translated propitiation, means the removal of divine wrath. Dr. Morris writes that the wrath of God is referred to 585 times throughout the Old Testament. He then says that while God’s wrath is not mentioned as frequently in the NT as the Old, it is there. Man’s sin receives its due reward, not because of some impersonal retribution, but because God’s wrath is directed against it (Rom. 1:18, 24, 26, 28). The whole of the argument of the opening part of Romans is that all men, Gentiles and Jews alike, are sinners, and that they come under the wrath and the condemnation of God. When Paul turns to salvation, he thinks of Christ’s death as *hilasterion* (Rom. 3:25), the means of removing the divine wrath. The paradox of the OT is repeated in the New that God himself provides the means of removing his own wrath. The love of the Father is shown in that he “sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (I John 4:10). The purpose of Christ’s becoming “a merciful and faithful high priest” was “to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17). His propitiation is adequate for all (I John 2:2) but is efficacious for those who believe in and follow him.

Sin is no light matter. Since God is holy, holy, holy, he is greatly offended by our sins. To maintain his justice and righteousness, he will not allow that which is sinful to enter his presence. Can you imagine what it would be like to face the wrath of God, appearing before him without being covered in Christ’s cleansing from our sin? At the same time, since he is love to the core of his being, he is unwilling to destroy us. In his just and loving being, he has provided a way whereby we can enter his presence, and that is by crediting us with Christ’s righteousness through faith. (Romans 4). A key part of that faith is the need to admit and confess our sins and to seek God’s forgiveness in Christ.

When we do make that confession and immediately receive God’s Assurance of Pardon from God’s Word, what relief we receive! What great comfort we have! What healing we experience! Our relationship with the most important being in and beyond creation, God, is restored, and that healing provides the basis for improvement in all other aspects of our life.

People try to cover, hide from, deny, and ignore their sinfulness and sins in all manner of ways, e.g., alcohol, drug abuse, sex, but none of them work: their sin and the accompanying guilt remain, and often become worse, no matter what they do apart from confession in Christ. Further, when guilt is unresolved, it emerges in manifold ways, e.g., in depression, anger, and in many other physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually counterproductive, including destructive, outcomes.

- 4) What are the implications for your worship service in your home church? (Ask the group to make notes for their Action Plan.) Include, e.g., the importance of a Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon early in the worship service. For more on this essential part of corporate worship, see Lesson Five.

GLORIFY CHRIST

c. Read, or ask others to read, Isaiah 53; Psalm 110:1-4; John 3:16; Romans 8:1; John 14:6.

1) Questions:

- a) What is the central idea, and what key words describe Christ, who he is and what he has done, in these texts? Write down at least one of those key words.
- b) Is this key understanding part of the worship in your church? Give an example.

2) Add any of the information below that the group did not report on Christ. Draw the graphics on the flipchart as you make the explanations.

- a) Christ is God's plan to remove the gap between himself and human beings. Christ makes possible our connection with God, which worshipers long to experience. **Jesus Christ and his work for us should be the focus of every Christian public worship service...**as is the focus of the whole Bible. Recall what St. Augustine said in a mnemonic rhyme:

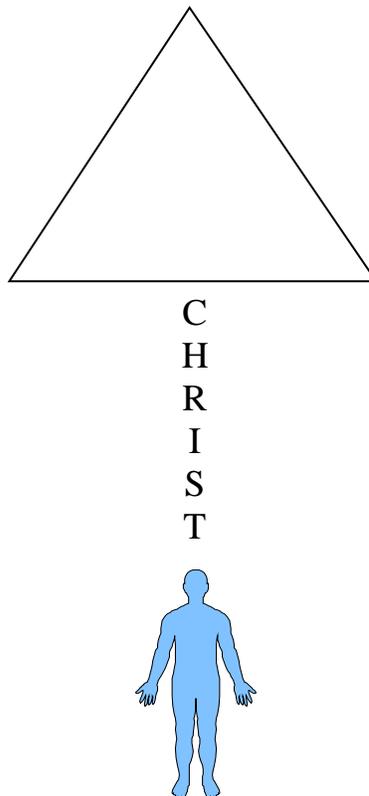
"The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed." It's all about Christ Jesus.

- b) Emphasize that Jesus Christ is God's only begotten Son. The term, only begotten, translates the word, *monogenes*, in John 3:16 in the original Greek, as we see in English versions such as the King James version of the Bible. Only begotten, unlike the modern term one and only, means that Christ is of the same essence as the Father (John 10:30), a crucial understanding of who Jesus Christ is, that he is divine as well as human, and the one necessary to proclaim in our worship as well as in other opportunities to witness for Christ.

3) What are the implications for your worship services in your home church? (Ask the group to make notes for their Action Plan.)

- a) One example: In each service proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in fresh ways. One way would be to tell the Gospel story in the following manner. Stimulate the people's imagination to remember what God did in Christ for us, what God went through while his only begotten Son suffered so grievously for us in the most wonderful demonstration of love ever! Contrast how we feel as parents when a peer or someone else mistreats our child; imagine how God felt when he stood by while soldiers, after they put a crown of very sharp thorns on Jesus' head, "again and again...struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him." (Mark 15:19) Ask, "What motivated Jesus to put up with the piercing agony of having those painful thorns beaten into his head, and the other suffering inflicted upon him? Why didn't he just call in the angels to rescue him and send the mockers home in humiliation or even destroy them?" (If he didn't die as prophesied, we would not have salvation! Our faith in him credits us with his righteousness. [Romans 4])

- b) Recite the Nicene Creed. This is the ancient Christian creed that is most used in church worship throughout the world, and it contains more vital details about Jesus Christ than does the Apostles' Creed. For edifying worshipers, use the Nicene Creed more than the less specific Apostles' Creed. Periodically, especially when focusing on the Trinity and the dual (divine and human) nature of the incarnation of Christ Jesus, use also the [Athanasian Creed](#), which has been used by the church at least since the fifth century A. D., if not by some earlier, and the [Chalcedonian Creed](#), which was adopted by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A. D., the other two of the four main historic Christian creeds.
- c) Emphasize the importance of obedience and bearing fruit in order to show our love for Christ and please God, beginning in the worship service in the Commitment to Obey God's Word as part of our RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD. (John 14:21; 15:8)
- d) Such reflection helps form the atmosphere of worship and direct our attention to why we are there and what we need to do. Ask, "Do any other implications come to mind?"
- 4) Amend the graphic on the flipchart as follows:



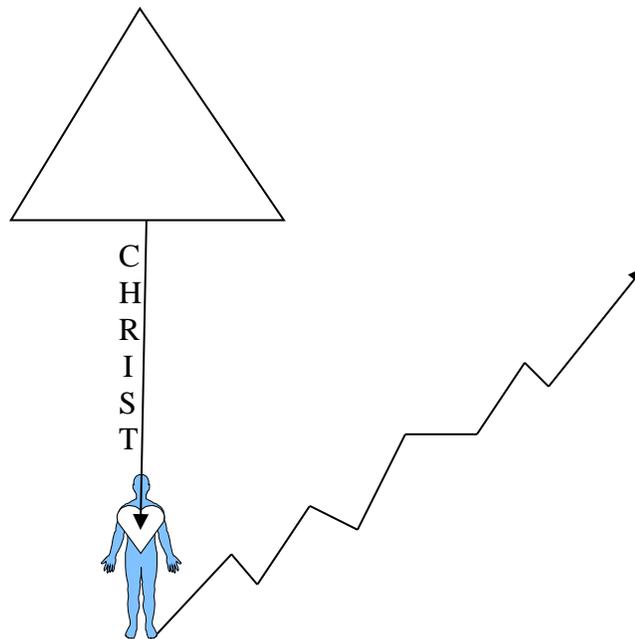
EDIFY WORSHIPERS

d. Read, or ask others to read, Nehemiah 9:3, 20, 30; 1 Corinthians 12:3, 14:1-17; Ephesians 2:8-10; John 3:3, 6:37-40, 10:27-29; Romans 8:15-16, 26; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-17.

1) Questions:

- a) What is the central idea and what key words in each text describe the Holy Spirit's application of Christ's work in our lives? Write down at least one of those key words.
- b) Is this key understanding part of the worship in your church? Give an example.

2) Add any of the information below that the group did not report on this work of the Holy Spirit. Draw the graphics on the flipchart as you make the explanations.



- a) The Holy Spirit gives us a new nature, the new birth, as Jesus taught in John 3:3, symbolized by the new heart in this graphic.
- b) This new nature from the Spirit, makes possible our faith. (1 Corinthians 12:3)
- c) Our salvation is by God's grace, not by our works (Ephesians 2:8-10).
 - What is an implication of this teaching for worship? (We offer thanksgiving to God [in prayers, music, sermons, and sacraments—Eucharist means thanksgiving] for this huge relief that, contrary to all other religions of the world, we do not need to earn our salvation!)
- d) The Holy Spirit assures us that we are God's children (Romans 8:15-16), and he helps us in our weakness, including in our prayer, interceding for us. (Romans

8:26) Worshipers can be sure of their salvation (John 6:37-40, 10:27-29), and they need to be reassured in corporate worship, for example in an assurance of pardon following a prayer of confession.

- e) Our salvation includes a process called sanctification (1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:7), or simply stated, growth toward Christlikeness. As in the figure above, our growth is onward and upward but not nice and smooth; it is often up and down. We sometimes do well and are “on the mountaintop,” the peak; at other times we slip and fall into the valleys, the pits; and sometimes we level off into stagnation and don’t grow. However, through the Holy Spirit and more involvement in God’s Word and prayer, especially in corporate worship and in relationships with other believers in Christ, we proceed in our sanctification. We are to grow in Christlikeness and to help our people to do so as well, including instruction in worship (e.g., through sermons) and edifying them in other ways in these services.

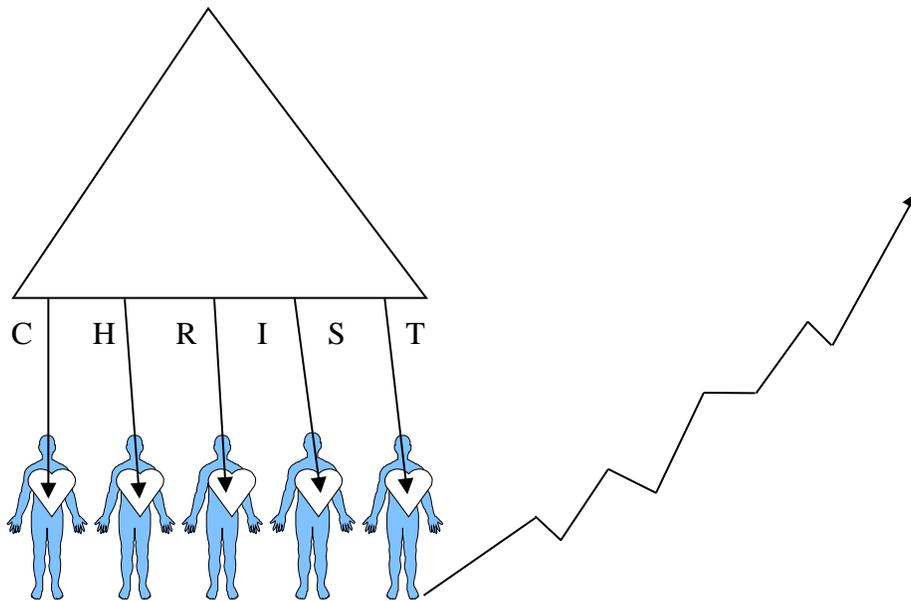
The section on Proclaiming God’s Word, including in particular readings from the Bible and the sermon, help people to learn, equipping them for effectively bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. The minds God has given all humans cry out for the truth, for meaning and significance to life, thus there must be intellectual substance to the sermon and to all aspects of worship. For this reason, the worship service also links with the educational ministry of the church.

Including a Biblically based question and answer from the church’s denominationally approved catechism in the RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD section of the worship service is another way to provide edification of the congregation. See Lessons One and Two.

- f) In worship we facilitate ways the Holy Spirit works in our lives, in the worship service, for the coming week, and throughout our whole lives.
- g) Note other implications for your home church in your Action Plan.

RENEW COVENANT OBLIGATIONS

- e. Read, or ask others to read, Genesis 12:1-4, 17:1-7; Exodus 23:9; 24:1-8; Deuteronomy 5:14; Matthew 7:12; 22:37-40; John 13:34-35; Galatians 3:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 1 Peter 2:9.
 - 1) Questions:
 - a) What is the central idea, and what key words describe the church, covenant people, in these texts? Write down at least one of those key words.
 - b) Is this key understanding part of the worship in your church? Give an example.
 - 2) Add any of the information below that the group did not report on these texts. Draw the following graphics on the flipchart as you make the explanations.



- a) What do the texts teach about the covenant, as it is now visible in the church, and the church's unity, universality, and purpose? What are the implications for our worship service in our home church?
- 1- One implication is that those gathered for corporate Christian worship are mostly Christians and should be treated as such. We are planning a worship service for God's covenant people to facilitate their worship of him. While there may be some non-believers present, we must not ignore the vast majority of believers and address the group as though they are pagans to be evangelized.
 - 2- The nonbelievers will also appreciate not being singled out; they have come to find out what Christian worship is like and what and how Christians believe and function. (Notice the implications of, e.g., Exodus 23:9, Deuteronomy 5:14, Matthew 7:12 and 22:37-40, i.e., treating aliens and unbelievers as yourself.) By hearing the Gospel and experiencing the love, including hospitality, of the church, with the Holy Spirit's help they also will be more informed and edified, and they will be more likely to consider believing in God and becoming part of His church.
 - 3- Further, since the church is the body of Christ, we are not a room full of individuals. We are united as one in Him!
 - **DISCUSS:** How do we help people mature in their sanctification, including developing a covenantal, global church, perspective with its caring and loving mission component that our Lord has commanded, when all, or even most, of the parts of the worship service are "all about me," (I... I... I... I... rather than We...) which, Biblically, they are not? Include any of the following that are not mentioned in the discussion:

- a- One practical step we can take to help people sense this relational unity is to use the first person plural (“we” instead of “I”) in the parts of our worship services, such as the following:
- 1} In the prayers we offer we should pray in the first person plural so all people feel involved and praying, that these prayers are theirs as well.
 - 2} Lyrics of music should mostly be in the first person plural.
 - 3} Our corporateness also extends far beyond the sanctuary in which we are worshiping. Our connection to the body of Christ all over the world (the church catholic) should be reflected in our worship services, e.g., in the following ways:
 - 4} by including the concerns of Christians in other countries (such as those being persecuted, especially those in grievous ways, and those facing such difficult problems as poverty and AIDS) in the General Prayers, our corporate prayer;
 - 5} by celebrating the Lord’s Supper on World Wide Communion Sunday;
 - 6} and by reciting statements of our common faith (e.g., using the Nicene Creed) in the original form of the creeds, i.e., in the first person plural (“we” believe rather than “I” believe) and including the word “catholic” (meaning global, universal, worldwide rather than “Christian”). The word catholic does not mean Roman Catholic, unless the word Roman is used with an upper case C on the word catholic. The word Christian should not be substituted for catholic; these two words are not at all synonymous. Who gives someone the authority to change historic officially authorized documents, such as the classic Nicene Creed? The results of such unauthorized, unwarranted, and counterproductive changes are disastrous for the maturation and mission of the church of (i.e., belongs to) Jesus Christ!
- b- The Christian faith is personal but not private. Therefore, it is important to sometimes use the first person singular in creeds (such as the Apostles’ Creed), songs, and other liturgical expressions, but the predominant use should be in the first person plural for the above and following reasons.
- b) In the Exodus 24:1-8 text and other passages in the Bible we see that in worship the people renewed their covenant with God and promised to obey him, to fulfill their covenant obligations.

- 1- Where do you provide an opportunity in your worship services for people to state their willingness and their commitment to obey God?
- 2- Where in the liturgy could you provide an opportunity in your worship services for people to state their willingness and their commitment to obey God?
- 3- What are other implications for your worship service in your home church? (Ask the group to make notes for their Action Plan.)

OFFER HOPE

f. Read, or ask others to read, Psalm 73:1-17; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Matthew 25:31-35; Revelation 5:6-12, 21:1-4.

1) Questions:

- a) What is the central idea, and what key words describe hope for the future for God's covenant people in these texts? Write down at least one of those key words.
- b) Is this key understanding part of the worship in your church? Give an example.

2) Add any of the information below that the group did not report on these texts. Draw the graphics on the flipchart as you make the explanations. Two parts of this category include two great concerns people have: the end of our own personal lives and the end of history when Christ returns. These two aspects of Biblical teaching are the subject of Christian theology called eschatology (> Greek: *eschaton*, last + *logos*, word, meaning study of) Thus, eschatology is the study of the last things, the end times: the end of our own personal lives (What takes place then?) and the end of history (What occurs then?).

- a) First of all, the focus of Christian worship is on Jesus Christ, whose life and work is not limited to this age, indeed to the Triune God. Christ and the Father and the Holy Spirit, are from everlasting to everlasting. Therefore, when we focus on Christ Jesus and the whole Triune Godhead, we look not only to the future in our lives now but also to heaven, where Jesus is seated on the throne at the right hand of the Father, in the light of all that means for us, individually and corporately. (Isaiah 6:1-8; Ephesians 1:1-23; Colossians 1:9-20; Revelation 4-5)
- b) The main aspects of the worship of the covenant community in Christ all address those two core issues of life and eternity. For example the celebration of Jesus' birth at the beginning of the church year always includes why he came, what he came to do. (E.g., Luke 2:25-35; note v. 35)
- c) Worship is oriented to both dimensions of the kingdom of God (the rule of God in human hearts and minds): that in Christ it is already here, but not yet in its fullest

and most complete form, which will occur at Jesus' Second Coming. Thus, *hope in Jesus Christ is a realized expectation*; it is already here, but its complete fulfillment awaits his assured Second Coming or our meeting him when we die, whichever comes first! (Cf. Romans 8:24; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:1-10) Sunday worship is grounded in Jesus' Resurrection, seen by over 500 witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:1-8), and points forward to his promised return and all that means for the kingdom of God.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper clearly points back to Jesus Christ's redemptive work here on earth (e.g., "do this in remembrance of me." [Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25]) **and** forward to when the kingdom is fully come (on "that day when I drink it [the cup] anew with you in my Father's kingdom." [Matthew 26:29]) In so doing, the Lord's Supper progressively shapes his worshipers' perspective and orientation to include more and more of the next phase of life in God's very presence, a perspective that yields great joy and gratitude.

That joy is why the Lord's Supper is called the Eucharist, which means thanksgiving. It is also why it is also placed in section in some liturgies where the people are Responding to God's Word. Also, Paul says, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26)

All these realities are why it is good to celebrate the Eucharist each Sunday. Many churches do, and even more often than that; some do so in worship services held daily.

- d) When we worship, we not only worship with the church here on earth, the church militant (Ephesians 6:10-18) but also with the church in heaven, the church triumphant (Revelation 5:6-10). See also Philippians 2:10.
 - 1- Some churches, such as the Eastern Orthodox churches with their carefully constructed liturgy in the context of a thoughtful and beautiful art and architecture facilitate this Holy Spirit-led experience in worship where the church militant senses it is worshipping our Triune God with the church triumphant. In our corporate worship we have a foretaste of worship in heaven made possible through the functioning of the Holy Spirit.
 - 2- Significantly, brothers and sisters in Christ from other Christian traditions have recognized the awesome Orthodox worship services. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod describes it well.

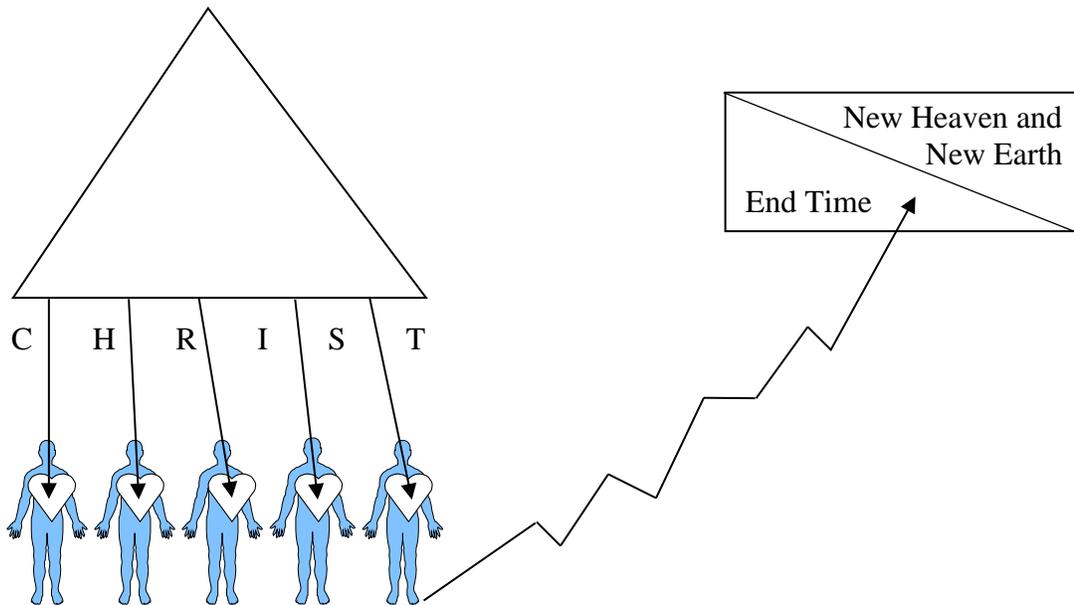
*Worship is like no place else in this world.
But there is one place that it does resemble, and that is heaven.*

The story is told of how Christianity was introduced to Russia. More than 1,000 years ago Grand Duke Vladimir of Kiev was interested in selecting an appropriate religion for his new

nation. His emissaries investigated the main religions of the day, including Roman Catholicism and Islam. But it was only after visiting the chief site of the Orthodox Church in Constantinople that they found what they were looking for. In their report to their duke, the emissaries noted that in Orthodox worship there was such solemn splendor that they had a hard time knowing whether they were in heaven or on earth.

Worship is like that: one foot in heaven with the other here on earth. What brings heaven into our earthly worship is not dependent on the elaborateness of the service or the sincerity of our devotion. Rather, it is because of the One who is present in our worship that we experience heaven on earth.

If worship is "heaven on earth," then it stands to reason that what we do and say in worship should in some sense give us a foretaste of that great feast to come.²



- 3) What do the texts teach about the Lord's plan for the end of our lives and the end of history? What is the place of this teaching in the Bible? Is it central or peripheral? It is central. The whole Bible after Genesis 3:15 is about God's plan to redeem his creation in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Many of the great questions of life and eternity are answered in the study of the end times.
 - a) Pertaining to the end of our lives, we learn of God's plan for his children's future. (The term children of God always in the Bible refers to those who believe in and follow the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ). We rejoice in the renewing of our assurance that our sins are forgiven, that we will be forever with our Triune God

² The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, <https://www.lcms.org/worship/liturgy> (Accessed 1/31/2021)

in his very presence and service, including in his worship, and with our loved ones in Christ together with all of his other children; that an eternity of joy is coming when there will be no more sadness; and that those who die before the Lord arrives again will experience that blessing as well as all believers present when he returns. All of these blessings are assured by the resurrection of Jesus.

- b) Pertaining to the end of history, these texts give believers the certainty of God's righteous judgment of evil that will occur when Jesus returns in his Second Coming. Here we have the answer to one of the most often asked questions, the one called the theodicy question (< Greek, *theos*, God + *dikaionē*, justice, righteousness): How can God, who is just and righteous, allow evil to occur? In addition to other texts throughout the Bible, those including God's revelation concerning the end of this age, the final judgment, hell, and the new heaven and the new earth answer that question and many more. All of this awareness is great encouragement for the faithful to remain faithful in the knowledge that all wrongs will be righted and their faithfulness will be vindicated; the renewing of creation gives hope for his people who have come to worship him.
 - c) The Bible does not go into all the details on these two subjects. During this age, God wants us to concentrate on his calling to proclaim his revelation of his plan for redemption in Christ for his people and for the rest of his creation, but he has told us just enough to assure us of our hope for the future to equip us for what he is calling us to do between now and then. More of what the Bible teaches about the end times is in [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology](#).
 - d) According to 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper we proclaim Jesus' death and his Second Coming, the culmination of God's plan for the end times, and give thanks for these supreme blessings. The sacrament emphasizes the sure, certain, and supreme hope we have in remembering what Christ Jesus has done for us in his life, suffering, death, and resurrection.
- 4) DISCUSS: What are implications for your worship service in your home church? (Ask the group to make notes for their Action Plan.)
4. Discuss as a large group: How can keeping these six principles in mind help us in planning worship pleasing to God? Add any of the following that are not mentioned in the discussion.
- a. These principles, which are an overview of the six main themes or teachings of the Bible, help us understand the context and basis of Christian worship.
 - b. They also help us proclaim and explain the whole counsel of God and avoid concentrating on only those parts of the Bible that are our favorites.
 - c. They can be used in our worship planning to determine the Biblical standard of what is acceptable and what not to include in our Christian corporate worship of God.
- As we've seen in these lessons from the Bible, we have considerable freedom as to what we include in our worship services, as long as we do so in accord with the Bible.

When we plan our services, we can use these six principles to help us decide what should be in the service and what we should do at another time. Can you think of any examples?

- 1) One example that has arisen in our workshops involves the question of allowing traditional African instruments and gestures such as dancing and clapping in worship. How do you answer such questions? Subject them to the six Biblical principles: Will doing so honor the Triune God, help assure forgiveness, glorify Christ, etc.? If using these instruments and gestures can be done according to these six Biblical themes and principles, we can conclude, as we did in the workshops, that doing so is acceptable to God in Christian worship.
 - 2) Again, where in the order of service should announcements be made? It is important to make some announcements while the whole congregation is still together, but let's see how the principles can help us with this decision. Do the announcements honor God? Assure forgiveness? Glorify Christ? Edify worshipers (not just inform them of meetings)? Renew covenant obligations? Offer hope? **Or**, do the announcements distract the people from the dialogue with God that is taking place in the worship service? (Likely the latter). Always remember, the people have come longing for hope. Let us not distract or deter them from experiencing that hope in the precious few minutes for worship (even if the service lasts for almost three hours as in some parts of the world). The announcements won't provide that hope; God and his Word and worship will! Therefore, a better place for the announcements is after the Benediction, while the people are still all together and are now interested in the special fellowship activities of the body of Christ as they leave the sanctuary and move to other settings. Be sure to keep the announcements brief. Just highlight the most important ones, and refer the people to your mail, email, Website, or other publications for further information and details.
5. Emphasize that these six subject categories are seen throughout the whole Bible. They are recurring themes that together summarize the main teachings of the Bible and are a helpful mnemonic tool that is easily remembered and valuable for explaining the main message of God's Word. For more information on all six of these six main themes of the Bible, see also my PowerPoint program, *[Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology](#)*.³

Summary

6. Mention to the attendees that these six principles may be simply stated (to help us more easily remember them) as follows: Does what we plan to do in public worship,...
- a. HONOR GOD?
 - 1) For example, as His being...

³ This program is on the Christian Theology page of my Website at either of these URLs (both go to the same Website): www.fromacorntooak12.com or www.edwardseely.com.

- a) Triune
 - b) Most holy
 - c) All loving, including just as well as gracious, merciful, and patient
- 2) Does the language we plan use to address and refer to God respect and honor him? Or is it a “palsy-walsy” flippancy that in effect demotes and diminishes him in human perception? **God is not our peer!** He is not our “Great Buddy in the Sky” or any of the other impudent terms cocky people thoughtlessly flaunt with faux familiarity. While Jesus has called his disciples his friends (John 15:14), he makes it clear he is also our Lord, where in the same verse he clearly says that we are his friends if we do what he commands. (See also the many other Scripture texts that state Jesus as Lord, e.g., John 20:28; 21:7; Acts 15:11; Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Philippians 2:11; 1 Timothy 6:3) We are to respect and honor our Triune God in his worship.
- b. ASSURE FORGIVENESS?
- 1) Since human beings are essentially sinful with hearts that are deceitful above all things and beyond cure, people cannot presume to walk into the presence of God who is most holy without being cleansed and forgiven.
 - 2) Believers sense their need for forgiveness of their sin and crave relief from their guilt; we need to facilitate their experience of these blessings.
- c. GLORIFY CHRIST?
- 1) The focus of every Christian public worship service is on proclaiming Christ and celebrating our redemption in the life, suffering, death and resurrection of the only-begotten Son of God, who is the only way to God and salvation. (John 14:6. Notice in this text that Jesus uses the definite article, “the,” in identifying himself. He is **the** way, **the** truth, and **the** life, and that no one comes to the Father except through him. Jesus did not say he was a way, one of several alternatives, or even the best way; far more: he said he is the **only** way to come into a relationship with the Father.)
 - 2) We glorify Christ, indeed the whole Triune God, by our daily worship, as we “offer [our] bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is [our] spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of his world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:1-2; cf. John 15:8)
- d. EDIFY WORSHIPERS?
- 1) The Holy Spirit gives new birth, a new nature.
 - 2) The Holy Spirit gives gifts, provides fruit in believers’ lives.
 - 3) Believers need to nurture these blessings and cooperate with the Holy Spirit to mature in Christ, to produce the good works that God created us to do in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:10)

- 4) The Holy Spirit is applying the redemption Christ made possible in our lives and throughout God's creation.
- e. RENEW COVENANT OBLIGATIONS?
 - 1) The church manifests the covenant and is the covenant community at worship.
 - 2) The people at worship have come together to renew their covenant relationship with God in the risen and reigning Christ, and to recommit themselves to obedience.
- f. OFFER HOPE? (Rooted in Jesus' return)
 - 1) Specify hope for the short-term.
 - 2) Specify hope for the long-term.
7. For further information, see Appendix E. Notice the Biblical basis for God's worship in Nehemiah 8-10 and the accompanying chart in the appendix.
8. If time remains allow the worship planning groups to prepare for the worship service that will be held in Lesson Six. If you don't have time in this session for the groups to work, remind them to keep proceeding on their own in order to accomplish their tasks before the fifth lesson begins. Also ask them to include any changes they want to make as a result of what they've learned in this lesson.
9. For any of the cognitive objectives you have not as yet observed the stated behavior, distribute file cards as needed, and ask the students to give you the stipulated responses. Be sure to ask them to sign their name on each card. Or, you can verbally ask the class, corporately in session or selected representative individuals, and/or those about whom you have a special concern, in or outside the class (especially outside and individually for those about whom you are concerned in order to avoid embarrassment and to facilitate their responses), to do the behaviors specified in the objectives. Review the instruction as needed, for any objectives that are not accomplished as you intend them to be. Doing so in class, will help those who need the remedial help and be a good memory refresher and reinforcer for those who have accomplished the objectives.

Action Plan Steps for Lesson Four

10. Say to the group, "For the remaining time in this session, let's continue work on our Action Plans. First individually, then in your groups of four, reflect on the following key questions [which you've put on the flipchart] that will help you evaluate the strength of your own church's worship."
 - a. In the light of the Bible passages we've been studying:
 - 1) What are some of the strengths of your church's worship services?
 - 2) What are some areas that need strengthening?

- 3) Is there anything you should eliminate or add to your worship service that you are not now doing?
 - 4) How can you already next week strengthen worship in your church?
- b. Circulate among the groups as they discuss these implications to help with any questions they have and to observe their progress.
 - c. Mention to the group that throughout the whole time we are together at this event, they should continue to think about the implications of all that we study in the Bible for how we should lead worship in our home churches and add ideas to their Action Plan as they occur to them.
11. Announce that in the next lesson we'll examine the subject of prayer in corporate worship.
 12. Offer a closing Prayer asking God's help to apply what has been learned in this lesson as he would have us do in the church(es) we are serving.

Prayer in Corporate Worship

Needs of the Learners:

1. Felt Needs:
 - a. See Lesson One section on felt needs.
 - b. Include here the needs the students identified in Lesson One that are applicable to the subjects in this lesson.
2. Unfelt Needs:

All the students need to learn the Biblical teaching on and how to develop and implement the following competencies:

 - a. The meaning and importance of including prayer in Christian corporate worship.
 - b. The different types of prayer in corporate worship.
 - c. What to include in these prayers.
 - d. Where the prayers occur in the worship service and how to offer those prayers.

Goal: This lesson will help the global church to correct a tragic development at this point in its history: the omission in many worship services, and the misuse in others, of corporate prayer, the occurrence of which deprives church members, visitors, the surrounding community, and the state, the nation, indeed, the whole world, of experiencing the powerful blessings of God through the prayers of his righteous people. (James 5:16) The participants also will learn the main types of prayer in a public Christian worship service according to the Bible, where to place the prayers in the worship service, and principles and practical tips for preparing and leading corporate prayer. At the conclusion of this session the participants will add to their specific Action Plan ways to implement these important teachings of the Bible in their own churches.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson each participant will be able to do the following:

1. Identify and explain, verbally or in writing, each of the four types of prayer in the Bible, using the ACTS model as presented in this lesson, including the meaning, significance, and order of each in Christian corporate worship and at least one reason why each is essential for planning corporate prayer in Christian worship.
2. List, verbally or in writing, at least three reasons why prayer should be included in public Christian worship.
3. Explain, verbally or in writing, where each of the prayers occur in the model for Christian public worship presented in this course, including the logic of the liturgy for its placement in that location.
4. Identify and explain the meaning and at least one benefit of each of the two key principles for planning a corporate Christian worship service that are taught in this lesson.
5. Identify and explain at least three practical tips for leading in prayer in corporate Christian public worship.
6. Participate with others in planning a public Christian worship service and begin working on at least one aspect of that service in which he or she will lead when the service is held during Lesson Six.
7. During this lesson, the teacher will observe only positive nonverbal feedback (e.g., enthusiasm, excitement, and joy) and hear no complaints when identifying and explaining the

meaning, significance, and placement of the four types of prayer in planning Christian public worship.

8. By the end of the course, at least 75% of the class members will demonstrate their affective interest by asking at least one question or making at least one positive comment in class, or with the teacher at break times, either verbally or in writing.
9. By the end of this course, at least 75% of the class will report to the teacher, verbally or in writing,
 - a. that they feel more confident in explaining to others the four types of prayer in the ACTS model and their placement in the worship service in accord with the logic of the liturgy,
 - b. and that they feel more motivated and able to implement the needed changes pertaining to prayer in the worship practices of their congregation.
10. By the next lesson, at least half of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via email, by regular mail, or on a 3 x 5 card) that they have talked with least one other person in the church(es) they serve about least one modification they want to make in the church's(es') corporate worship pertaining to prayer.
11. Within three months of the end of this course, at least 75% of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via text, via email or by regular mail) that they have implemented in their congregation's worship services at least three aspects of corporate prayer that they learned in this course.
12. Add to the Action Plan for the church(es) he or she is serving at least one idea from this lesson that he or she wants to implement and at least one SMART step to do so.
13. Within three months of the end of this course, all the students will have begun to implement at least three elements of their Action Plan pertaining to this lesson within the congregation(s) they serve.

Materials Needed

1. The first three materials listed in Lesson One.
2. At least one 3 x 5 file card for each participant. These are always helpful for many purposes.

Introduction

1. Review: What did we learn from our previous lesson? Discuss and list responses on the flipchart.
2. Ask for brief (two minutes or less) reports on the Action Plans developed at the end of the last lesson. List them on the flipchart as they are given. Discuss the most promising.
3. Ask the question, "When people come to worship, what is one of the things they most want to do?" When the answer connect with, come into the presence of, pray, communicate, or talk with God, or any such terminology, is mentioned, say "Yes! And that is the subject for our discussion today."

Why Pray?

1. Opening: Welcome; read a brief Bible passage related to today's lesson; offer prayer.
In the whole group state that many churches today don't include prayer in their worship

services. Others only offer a brief prayer. Ask the group to identify reasons for including prayer in their corporate worship services. Give a few moments for thinking before mentioning any reasons yourself. As the group begins to cite reasons, list them on the flipchart. Add any of the following that the group doesn't mention:

- a. God welcomes, encourages, exhorts, urges, and even commands us to pray. (2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 32:6; Isaiah 55:3; Matthew 6:9; 11:28; Luke 6:28; 18:1; Ephesians 6:18)
- b. People want to offer prayers of adoration praising God for who he is.
- c. People sense a need to pray a prayer of confession for cleansing in order to approach God who is most holy, and they long to hear assurance that God forgives them.
- d. Worshipers want to offer gratitude for the countless blessings he has already granted this very day, as well as ever in the past, and as he will do so forever for his people.
- e. People come to corporate worship to meet with God, to clear away anything that would keep them from him, and to commune with him. They want the assistance of the people of God to approach God in prayer, specifically that the worship leader will lead them in prayer. In addition to God's forgiveness and his help to truly repent and turn away from sinning in the ways they've been doing, they want God's help in many other ways, the blessings that come from prayer: including healing; relief from stress; his intervention in their community, nation, and the rest of the world; and well-being for others and themselves. And that's just the beginning of what they want God to know and do.

The Types of Prayer in the Bible and in Christian Worship

2. We see several different types of prayer in the Bible. It is important that we understand the Biblical meaning of these prayers.

Since this is Lesson Five, the group may now feel comfortable enough with each other for you to be able to conduct this discussion in one large group. However, if you do have difficulty in drawing out discussion, have the workshop participants work at first in their small groups of four for five minutes on each question; then ask the reporters to answer the questions, each reporter giving only one of his or her group's responses at a time. Then ask the next group's reporter and so on until all have shared all their responses. Record on the flipchart the responses of each small group, so the whole group can hear what was said and write down the responses in their notes. Do one question at a time in the above manner.

We see four main types of prayer in the Bible with some subcategories within them. They are often referred to as prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication (request). Notice that the first letters of the four main prayers in public worship, spell the acronym ACTS in English: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Write these words on the flipchart. This tool for remembering these prayers in corporate worship is often referred to as the ACTS model for prayer. (It's also a good model to use for personal prayer.) What is the corresponding word for acts in the language you use most?

- a. Consider first the prayers of Adoration. Looking at Biblical texts such as Psalm 86:8-10 and Psalm 100:4, what do we say in prayers of adoration? Record the responses of the group on the flipchart; do so for responses to questions about the three remaining types of prayer as well. Think about the awesome and magnificent privilege it is to pray to the owner and ruler of the universe! How do, or would, you feel meeting and talking with an important person in your country? (E.g., chancellor, president, member of Parliament, military general, CEO of a company? How much greater it is to come into the presence of God and commune with him!

- b. Next consider prayers of Confession. Turn to Ezra 9:5-7; Psalms 32:1-5; 51:1-14, 42:1-5; 86:1-7; and 1 John 1:5-10. Confession of our sinfulness and sins is needed early in the worship service, right after the Invocation and opening songs of praise, for God is most holy, and we must be cleansed, forgiven, of all that would offend him in his presence. Since God is holy—in fact holy, holy, holy (the way of saying “Most Holy” in the Hebrew language, Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8)—he is not pleased with and is offended by sin, and he will not listen to those with unrepentant sin (Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 1:15; 58:4; 59:2; Jeremiah 7:16; 11:1-17, esp. 11, 14; 14:10-12; Ezekiel 8:18; Micah 3:4; John 9:31; 1 Peter 3:12); **nevertheless**, since he is also all love to the core of his being, (1 John 4:8) he graciously forgives us when we confess and repent of our sinfulness and sins and obey him. (John 14:23; 1 John 1:5-9). Notice this additional aspect of God being holy, holy, holy: This is the only one of God’s attributes to be repeated three times; clearly sin is very serious in God’s sight! We can’t sin with impudence and then casually saunter into God’s holy sanctuary and assume that God owes us something just because we showed up!

What are prayers of confession and what are some elements that prayers of confession include? When the discussion has been as productive as it will, either review (to see if the following have been mentioned) or add the following:

- 1) Prayers of confession, are referred to as epicletic prayers (> Greek: *epi*, upon + *kaleō*, to call), i.e., prayers that call upon God, typically with a request, in this case to implore his forgiveness. They ask pardon from God, who is most holy, for sins of commission (things we’ve done that we should not have done; wrongs we’ve committed) and sins of omission (things we should have done that we did not do; good that we’ve omitted and neglected to do).

- 2) The prayers of confession involve at least the following subjects:
 - a) Expressions of shame for our sin against God;

 - b) Lament, sorrow for our sin and other wrongdoing as individuals and for the sin in our society’s institutions and in the church, including any we’ve done by commission or omission;

 - c) Requests that God forgive us, individually and corporately, for our sins and our sinfulness;

 - d) Requests for God’s help to do rightly, to not repeat the sins.

- 3) When leading in prayer, it is important to be careful in our wording of the congregation's prayers, which is an important reason for writing out our prayers ahead of time. We need to avoid common, especially over-used and thoughtless expressions, and especially ones containing unbiblical and inaccurate theology. During the Prayer of Confession, one of these expressions to avoid is the often-used, "...we have too often [sinned in this manner, fill in the blank, e.g., gossip, disrespect, or sins of omission, i.e., failing to do something we should have done]." Statements like this confuse and even mislead people, implying that such behavior was OK up to that point, but now we have "crossed the line" and have done it too much. The truth is that if we have committed a sin only once, it has offended God who is most holy; indeed, he is holy, holy, holy. We thus need to repent of that sin and commit to not repeating it.
- 4) Consider using the Kyrie Eleison as part of the Prayer of Confession and a moving segue into God's Assurance of Pardon, which should immediately follow the Prayer of Confession. To help people sense the importance and urgency of this part of the worship service, the seriousness of our sins in relationship with God who is not only holy but holy, holy, holy, an ancient element in worship throughout the global church is a musical expression called the Kyrie Eleison, literally the congregational plea, "Lord have mercy." It is sung right at the end of the Prayer of Confession and just before the Assurance of Pardon, which next follows promptly. The Kyrie is expressed as the whole congregation sings, "Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us." The Kyrie is especially impactful and meaningful, for it is expressed musically, which involves both the right hemisphere and the left hemisphere of the brain's cerebrum, i.e., both the cognitive and the affective, the intellectual and the emotional parts of our being, thus we are fully engaged in not only the subject content of what we are doing but also how strongly we feel about our need for forgiveness.
- 5) God's Assurance of Pardon should come from a passage in his Word, the Bible. Immediately coming from God himself, the Assurance of Pardon gives worshipers the certainty of God's forgiveness, the greatest sense of relief and release from the burden of our guilt, and the joy of God's cleansing of us in Christ.

The Prayer of Confession **immediately** followed by God's Assurance of Pardon, read or sung from his Word, together constitute a vital and powerful part of the worship service. They honor God, and they meet human beings' greatest needs: clearing away all that would separate us from God and relieving us of the huge burden of guilt and its effects that our sins weigh upon us. As God's true believers in Jesus Christ, we come to worship him, longing to hear his assurance that we are forgiven of all our sinfulness and sins that press heavily upon us with a weighty burden that we cannot ourselves remove, e.g., through abuse of drugs, alcohol, or other means of escape. They cannot be dealt with and overcome without God's help in and through Jesus Christ. The burden of our sinfulness and sins and the guilt thereby produced is also the root cause of people's deepest spiritual, psychophysical and social disorders, such as guilt, alienation, loneliness, anxiety, and depression, as well as many additional ailments and other problems, and this burden of our sinfulness, sins, and guilt can only be relieved and removed by God, as we confess and repent of our sin, including the honest and sincere promise and resolve to not repeat those sins and to obey God's Word and will with his all-sufficient help in Christ through the Holy Spirit. This freedom God provides equips us to resolve interpersonal disharmony with other human beings, e.g., with our family, friends, and others. In so doing, we experience spiritual, physical, and relational healing and health!

- **Assurance of Pardon:** The Prayer of Confession **MUST** be followed **IMMEDIATELY** with God's Words of Assurance of our pardon, unless the singing of the brief Kyrie Eleison (*op cit.*), which is part of the Prayer of Confession, is placed between the Prayer of Confession and the Assurance of Pardon, in which case the Assurance of Pardon **immediately** follows the Kyrie. The Assurance of Pardon is most powerful when a passage from the Bible is used, usually read, but in some cases sung either by a cantor or the congregation, but always with words directly from God, assuring his people of their forgiveness after repenting of their sins. All of us who are true believers in the Triune God, who are keenly aware of our sinfulness and sins and who long to please God and to receive his blessing, need to hear directly from God's Word his certification that we are forgiven and embraced in his presence. This is one of the most beautiful and moving parts of corporate worship—another offer of hope! For other examples of Scriptures that can be used for the Assurance of Pardon, see Appendix A.
- c. Turn to Psalm 100. Prayers for **Thanksgiving** are part of worship. What can be included in such prayers? Ask the group to mention specific items to include in such a prayer for which the congregation is grateful. Continue until the following are mentioned (add any yourself that the group may overlook):
- 1) We offer thanksgiving for God himself (Psalm 100:4), his characteristics (such as his goodness; love, which also includes justice and righteousness; for being most holy;

and for his faithfulness [Psalm 100:5]), and his mighty acts of salvation in Jesus Christ; for the Bible and the Holy Spirit's help in understanding and in applying it to our lives; for our forgiveness in Christ (being careful to avoid confessing more sins here, which should be done in the Prayer of Confession); for being able to worship in peace in this sanctuary; for God's work in the world, overseeing and governing all things to accomplish his purposes; for the church; for our families; for ourselves, for the Father's giving us our original birth, for the new birth in Christ; and for our high and holy calling to serve, including worshiping, him in his eternal presence (cf. James 1:17); indeed, for everything. (Ephesians 5:20. See more below on this verse).

- 2) If it has not been mentioned in the group discussion, remind the group of James 1:17: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like the shifting shadows." His gifts are countless and continuous, never ceasing. Ask the group to think of all that they count as good and perfect in their personal lives that the rest of the congregation shares. Give them three minutes to list what comes to their minds. Ask for volunteers to mention one at a time.
- 3) All that is good and perfect is from God. (James 1:17) He deserves our gratitude expressed in thanksgiving through prayer and in lives devoted to serving him in obedience to his Word and will. (John 14:21; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:11-12) Sometimes he gives us gifts directly in our hearts and minds, e.g., guidance on a particular matter, and other times he blesses us directly and indirectly through other people. Since God is the giver of every good and perfect gift, he deserves our thanksgiving in and for everything. (Philippians 4:6; Ephesians 5:20)
- 4) Add that many, if not most, of God's blessings we are completely unaware of. Consider just a few. He has directed drunk drivers to select an alternate route, or steered them away, from the one we and our family were using, thus sparing us a tragic automobile crash. He has caused an airline mechanic to notice a vital repair that was required in order for our plane to fly safely. He led us to a home that was built by a contractor who did his work well and didn't "cut corners," failing to include necessary lumber and other materials in order to pocket the saved money or materials for himself. Especially when we ask him, he leads us to those who will provide sound and wise financial advice to more than meet our needs, though not necessarily to make us rich (which is fraught with dangers, e.g., as Paul explains to Timothy in his first letter.¹). He guides and directs those who manage, and the countless people

¹ Paul writes, "Those who *want* to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the *love* of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, *eager* for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." (1 Timothy 6:9-10 TNIV) Certainly God has throughout history employed wealthy people in the accomplishment of his purposes. Yet the Bible indicates, including in this text (see the words I've italicized), that though there is nothing wrong with wealth per se, and it is a gift from God (e.g., it's an implication of James 1:17), it is best not to strive for and prioritize that goal. In my own observation, a follower of Christ who becomes wealthy is likely one for whom money and other accumulations are more a means rather than an end in themselves. They consciously want their possessions and other assets to be for God's use, and they pray that God directs them as to such use of their means.

who have any influence on, our financial portfolios. Ask the group to identify other examples as time allows that could be included in the General Prayers.

- 5) In Ephesians 5:20, the apostle Paul writes, “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” For everything? The eminent New Testament scholar, R. C. H. Lenski, offers the following insightful and helpful commentary on this verse.

Another participle, again without “and,” defines this utterance in singing and in playing in another direction: gratitude must run through it all, “giving thanks always for all things,” etc. This is the main substance that dare not be absent. “Always” might mean simply that the Christian will always find *some* cause for thanksgiving; the addition “for all things” shows that *all* of them actually furnish such a cause. Rom. 8:28 explains. Under the divine control even painful experiences, calamities, etc., must bring us spiritual benefits such as driving us closer to God to seek his protection, making us search his Word more earnestly for comfort, etc.

The addition “in our Lord Jesus Christ’s name” should not be read superficially as though we are merely to add this phrase to our thanksgiving. This phrase occurs often. The ὄνομα [name] always signifies revelation, the Name which reveals our Lord to us, the means by which we apprehend him; and ἐν = in union or connection with (sphere). Hence we are told not merely to believe in his Name. Our trust is to be connected with his revelation. No man knows God save by means of his Name. We are baptized “in (not into) the Name of the Father,” etc. The act is connected *in toto* [totally] with the revelation of the Father, etc.

The same is true with regard to our thanksgiving. The Name includes the person, for it reveals him, that is its function. His Name is then the sphere that surrounds all our gratitude and its expression. Hence the full designation “our Lord Jesus Christ,” the concentrated formula that expresses all his Lordship, his Christhood, his person, Jesus (see 1:2, 17) as these are revealed in all Scripture.

Here there is another example of one article used with two terms to denote one person exactly as in v. 5. In connection with the blessed revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ we have free access to him who is our God and Father. As God Almighty and our heavenly Father with infinite love he makes all things redound to our good, and as his “children beloved” all our thanksgiving is offered to him “in the name of our Lord.” It is a fine thing that Paul thus adds the word “Father.” We fail to understand the comment that Paul does

not mean “our Father.” The nouns go together. Is he not our God and Father, is he only our God and Christ’s Father? The designation of both persons is plainly soteriological.²

- 6) I have explained more about giving thanks for all things in my essay, “[Preparing for Living Again as an Unmarried Person: Begin Now.](#)” I wrote this essay/personal testimony when God brought my precious wife of 48 ½ years, Carol, home to heaven. These many years later, I continue to affirm all I said and wrote, and I always will.
 - 7) In Psalm 100:4, we read, “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.” The original Hebrew word, “thanksgiving,” is the noun, תִּוְדָה (*tôdhāh*). It is used 32 times throughout the Old Testament, and it is only expressed to God, individually or liturgically—never to thank human beings.
- d. Regarding Supplication (including intercession) turn to 1 Timothy 2:1-2. Since worship deals with reality, daily reality and ultimate reality (eschatology), what is included in a Prayer of Supplication? When finished discussing this question, review or add the following:
- 1) Supplication involves intercession, i.e., making requests for others pertaining to the following subjects. First state that we need to pray for specific needs globally and at home. Ask why this is important to do. (Do this either in the group as a whole or by asking for reports from small group work.) Include any of the following the participants don’t mention.
 - a) The whole world belongs to God, and he is working through his covenant people to redeem the world. If we (who, due to our righteousness in Christ, are God’s covenant people and whose prayers thereby are powerful and effective [James 5:16]), don’t pray for the resolving of conflicts, the required aid in disasters, and the transformation of the nations, who will? And the unrighteous have no Biblical basis for assuming God will hear their prayers. (Isaiah 1:15) Further, God has told us to pray for others. (1 Timothy 2:1-2.) Intercessory prayer helps people connect more with righteous believers throughout the rest of the world and grow in understanding their calling and mission in Christ.
 - b) The church universal, exists in every country. We need to pray for the church throughout the world, especially for those brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering in extraordinary and in very grievous ways, including beatings, torture, kidnapping, and many other horrific kinds of persecution, designed to pressure them to recant their faith and deny Christ, and taxing, abusing and killing them if they do not deny Christ. It has been said that more Christians throughout the world are being persecuted, including being martyred, in this past 100 years than in all previous centuries combined! They are pleading for our prayers; we must not overlook them! Indeed, we must pray for them and help them in other tangible ways. In addition to denominational missions, many excellent

² R. C. H. Lenski, *New Testament Commentary - The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*, p. 623, *Wordsearch 12*.

parachurch missions are doing outstanding service to those being persecuted. Some of them are Voice of the Martyrs, Mission India, and Samaritan's Purse.

Our brothers and sisters, other children of God, all over the world also have many additional needs they would like us to bring to the Lord with and for them. For example, many suffer from severely damaging, and even lethal, storms; terrorist killings; and epidemics. Pay careful attention to the daily news to know what to include in this part of the General Prayers in your worship service.

Pray also that the church, including its leaders and educational institutions, remains faithful to God's Word and will. Ask God to strengthen, embolden, and encourage these leaders so that they do not fail to speak and act as God has called them to do, including in moral righteousness, living holy lives, speaking the truth in love, and that they lead the church to transform, and not conform to, the culture. (Romans 12:1-2) Also ask God to help the church people to support their leaders in all the ways needed, including with material needs, affirmation, and corrective feedback, including church discipline when required. These prayers are all intercessions for others.

Be sure to pray regularly, even weekly, even daily, that God extends and nurtures his kingdom throughout this country and throughout the world. His kingdom is the Biblical term for the rule of God in human hearts and minds and is embodied in the global church. The *extension* of God's kingdom occurs through evangelism and witness for Jesus Christ, whereby as people hear the Gospel of Christ Jesus, the Holy Spirit works in their hearts and minds and brings believers to saving faith in Christ, resulting in their justification by God. In historic Biblical theology, justification is the once-for-all declaration by God that the new believer's faith is credited to him or her as righteous in his sight; justification is also referred to as being in positional sanctification in relationship with and holiness to God.

The *nurture* of God's kingdom occurs through the life-long progressive sanctification process of the Holy Spirit, where new believers don't remain spiritual infants but mature in Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-5:20) Both the extension and nurture of God's kingdom are needed. No political party, government leader, legislation, or enforcement will solve the injustice and disharmony of any country, church, or family; only the Holy Spirit's positional and progressive sanctification (see Essential Christianity) can change hardened human hearts and minds.

- c) Include supplication for the world's leaders, mentioning specific matters of importance, including requests for God's wisdom, guidance, and direction for those involved in key issues in the news, and restraint where needed. We should model praying for especially important and urgent issues about which people are concerned and troubled, not only in the daily newspaper but that are also reported on the Internet, TV news, and in other news sources. Ask people to also pray for these matters at home as well, as they read the paper and watch the news. Include in the General Prayers some names of specific leaders and issues, but avoid

partisan bias in matters that are not essentially moral or Biblical in the prayers and other parts of public worship. Be prepared to explain how the matter(s) you included in the General Prayers are included in God's Word.

- d) Regarding intercession for peace, when you pray for peace include two key dimensions that are major motifs (concepts, themes, doctrines) in the Bible:
- 1- Include the vertical dimension. The greatest need for peace is that which comes through justification or positional sanctification, reconciliation with God, and that peace is a prerequisite for peace on the horizontal level, peace among people on earth.
 - 2- When you pray for peace on the horizontal level, e.g., that people in countries where violence and war are occurring, pray for *peace with justice*. It is possible, and undesirable, to have peace but without justice. Tyrants can and do rule with oppressive suppression and bring some peace but at a huge cost that seriously diminishes life and hinders God's people experiencing the *shalom* he intends for his creation he is in the process of redeeming. The Hebrew word *shalom* in the Old Testament means peace; completeness; welfare; unconcern; ease; prosperity; a state of being unmolested, unviolated, unhurt; uninjured; health; to be entire, sound, safe, completed, finished; restored; whole; justice; harmony; delight; salvation.³ (Genesis 43:27; 1 Samuel 20:13; 1 Kings 2:33; 2 Chronicles 8:16; Esther 2:11; Psalm 120:7)
- e) DISCUSS: What global needs should we include in our prayers for next Sunday and for any other corporate worship services we are planning? These prayers are all intercessions for others.
- f) Pray for your country in particular, including for wisdom and God's guidance for its leaders and judges in their decisions and actions, for God wants to redeem all parts of his creation, desiring that all obey him and do his will. (Jeremiah 29:7; 1 Timothy 2:1-7) Pertaining to partisan politics concerning non-Biblical matters (i.e., subjects not specifically addressed in Scripture, where no Biblical issue is at stake, especially where Christians can legitimately hold opposing viewpoints on those matters), and complicated, and highly emotional issues, where members and others in the congregation hold opposing views, pray in general and principal terms for God's help in resolving those matters according to his will, so as to not unnecessarily distract from God's worship. Simply ask that God work in the hearts and minds of all the people involved to bring about the resolution that is best in *his* sight. Nevertheless, national, state/province, and local issues that are clearly contrary to the Bible can and should be carefully included, with reference to God's Word, e.g., for those who are being persecuted, abortion, physician-

³ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner (eds.), *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), pp. 973-974. B. Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons Limited, 1963), p. DCCXX; and Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Reformed Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), pp. xii, 51, 58, 95, 105, 113, 139.

assisted suicide, euthanasia, genetic experimentation that attempts to unite animal and human genes, sexual and other immorality, divorce, and injustices being perpetrated. Bring these concerns to the Lord pastorally, with an understanding tone of voice expressing concern for underlying suffering where occurring but requesting God to overrule the wrong means of addressing that suffering and with a plea for God's help in resolving the matters in ways and with the results that are right in his sight and please him.

- g) Pray also for the local communities and tribes, for our governmental and social needs, for the protection of, wisdom, and discernment for first responders who daily risk their lives, including emergency medical technicians, fire fighters, and public law enforcement officers charged with resisting sin and evil and keeping us safe. (1 Timothy 2:1-7)
- 2) Supplication also involves prayers for ourselves, e.g., our church in particular,
- a) Corporately, including matters pertaining to the whole congregation, for such needs of the church as raising up teachers and other leaders who are maturing in Christ Jesus, for wisdom on issues the church is facing, for the needed funds in accord with the church budget, as well as for the denomination of which the local congregation is a part, and
 - b) for specific individuals (only mentioning names with the person's permission), those in or associated with your congregation, especially for those who have asked for prayer, and for those who have extraordinary needs (e.g., serious illness, bereavement, loss of employment) known to the congregation. Include heartfelt lament and concern for people who suffer (cf., Psalm 42:1-5) and request specific practical help from God to meet their needs. Invite and accept prayer requests, including for those who wish to remain anonymous, written on file cards, and given to an usher to bring forward to the worship leader who is to offer the General Prayers.
- 1- It is important to include laments in worship. There are many laments in the Bible. Further, if the church only offers praise, as is a current trend in many sectors of the church, observers can wrongly conclude that God is not interested in people's heartfelt struggles and/or that the church is out of touch with or unconcerned about the grim realities in the world. Throughout church history the psalms of lament (cf. Appendix A) have given much comfort to God's people in times of grave trouble, e.g., the persecution and harsh treatment of the French Huguenots in the 17th Century, the African-Americans of especially the 16th through the 20th centuries, and yet today for minorities, who are not regarded in any particular society but who do bear the image of God, and are thus worthy of our loving and trying to help them. For more on humans made in and bearing the image of God and its implications, see my PowerPoint program, "[Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology with a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions.](#)"

- 2- Asian scholar, Vinoth Ramachandra, admonishes and warns churches in the majority world to avoid adopting the unbiblical worship practices of churches in the West, in particular the omission of lament. He writes,

The virtual disappearance of lament from the pulpit, prayers and liturgies of churches in Asian churches that slavishly imitate the worship styles of affluent Western churches is a matter of grave concern, not least because it encourages dishonesty in our relationships with God and one another...[which] is not only pastorally damaging but theologically shallow....[The omission of lament in worship results in the people having] no vocabulary with which to articulate their pain because the biblical tradition of lament has been ignored in their churches....It is not surprising, then, that many sensitive and thoughtful young people choose to “drop out” of church as their honest doubts and struggles are not being addressed.

To those who refuse to face the suffering of those amongst whom they live, or feel shame at their own vulnerabilities....And churches which suppress the biblical lament tradition in their preaching and liturgies are churches which are very much part of the status quo, having invested massively in the preservation of exploitive and oppressive social relations.⁴

While God invites us to draw near to and communicate truthfully what is on our minds and hearts, which he already knows, some people who do take the inclusion of laments seriously, including the laments in the Bible where leaders among God’s people have gone to the extent of expressing anger toward God, as did the Prophet Jeremiah (e.g., 15:17-18), if done, those who do must remember what God said to Jeremiah immediately after the prophet concluded his angry outburst: “If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman.” (15:19) God permits us to be honest with him, but he requires us to remember who he is and to respect him, indeed, with the highest respect that is due to him only; we have to remember with Whom we are talking and to act accordingly; God is not just anybody!

At such times, recall how Job spoke with God when he learned that so many of his family and possessions were destroyed. He prayed, “‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.’ In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.” (Job 1:21-22; and chapters 38-42)

⁴ Vinoth Ramachandra, “Devotional: Lament and Resilience,” *Cultivate*, Spring 2021 (Langham Partnership USA), pp. 18-19. This article is an excerpt from Vinoth Ramachandra, *Sarah’s Laughter* (Chapter 1: Why, O Lord, Do You Hide Your Face?), Langham Global Library, 2020.

As with the Psalms of lament in the Bible, laments should end with reverence, honor, praise and affirmation for God and confidence of ultimate resolution. (Cf., e.g., Psalm 22) At times of anguish, God's people always have hope, which in the Bible is shown to be a [realized expectation](#).

3. Are there other ways you've observed, used, or can think of to organize the General Prayers? List any that the group mentions. If this one is not included say that another way to structure or organize the General Prayers (sometimes called the Pastoral Prayer, the Prayers of the People, or the Congregational Prayer) is to use each statement in the Lord's Prayer as a heading. Jesus said, "In this manner [Greek: οὕτως (*houtōs*)] therefore pray..." (Matthew 6:9) Thus, we can pray his exact words, and we can use his words as the heading for further specific statements in each category in his model prayer. The one leading in prayer can offer the whole prayer in this manner, or he or she can do so in the form of bidding prayers (*op cit.*) in which the congregation is bade (invited) to pray aloud or in silence in response to each statement.

Since a prayer of confession has occurred early in the worship service, don't duplicate or elaborate in the General Prayers; emphasize Jesus' statement about "as we forgive our debtors/those who transgress against us," and request that God help us to do this forgiving. Thanksgiving could be included after the adoration and request in the first part/petition, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name," since thanksgiving naturally flows from this praise. Yet Jesus meant more than that as well: be sure to emphasize what Jesus taught, i.e., to pray first that all should treat God's name as sacred and most holy, including by bearing fruit and obeying him (e.g., John 15:8 ff.).

If time allows, ask the groups to compose a General Prayer for use next Sunday, organized according to the sections of the Lord's Prayer. Ask half of the groups to write out the whole prayer and the other half to frame the prayer in the form of a bidding prayer.

A brief example to provide the participants follows. The traditional form is used here, but a more contemporary wording may also be used.

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." Truly, O God, you are most holy. May you always be honored and glorified in all that we do; please help, even direct, us to treat your name as sacred both with our lips and in all our other actions, for only you are worthy. Gracious God, Father, only begotten Son Christ Jesus, and Holy Spirit, three in one, only you are God; how great you are and greatly to be praised! [Add here specific thanksgiving for God's blessing.]

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Help us to always remember the high and holy calling you have given us to be your people wherever we are, at home, at work, in the marketplace and anywhere else in the world we find ourselves. Guide us, and your church catholic [or global church], to obey your commands and to implement your Word in all we do. [Add here supplications as discussed in the preceding section on the ACTS model.]

"Give us this day, our daily bread." Grant not only to us, we pray, but to all in your church worldwide all we require to sustain us for the work to which you have called us to do. Please

help especially those who are ill, out of work, and who have oppressive financial obligations. Please give an extra measure of your grace to your people everywhere who are suffering. Help them, we humbly ask, to serve you well, even finding joy in spite of their suffering, and relieve them as they have need. Please also bless those churches and mission organizations who are bringing help to all people and grant that many respond in faith to you dear Lord Jesus, including coming into the nurture of your global church.

“Forgive us our debts/trespases as we forgive our debtors/those who trespass against us.” Help us, O God, to love even our enemies, including those who have stolen from us, whether it be material possessions, identity theft, intellectual property, including ideas; who have harmed us or our loved ones; or who have unjustly damaged our reputation. Thank you for assuring us of our forgiveness, through crediting righteousness to us for our faith in Christ Jesus. Please enable us to forgive all who have wronged us in any way, employers, employees, fellow workers, neighbors, spouse, children, parents, teachers, merchants, and any others, so that you continue to forgive us in accord with your Word.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” O God, we want to function according to your will, but we are weak and need your constant help. Temptations constantly surround us; keep them from us, we pray. Always help us flee them and avoid the unrealistic idea that we can flirt with evil and come away unscathed with no harm to ourselves or to others.

“For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.” Bless your people everywhere, that your kingdom may be nurtured and extended throughout this country and around the world, for that is the only hope of our nation and all others. Please use your all-mighty power to accomplish your purposes in the redemption of your creation. May your people all over this globe glorify you, not just in our words, but in all that we do, now and forever. Amen.

Engaging the Congregation in the Prayers

4. How can we facilitate the people’s engagement in congregational prayer? Ask for suggestions from the seminar attendees, and list responses on the flipchart as they are offered. Add any of the following that are not mentioned. Some ways worship leaders have facilitated this engagement are as follows.
 - a. Consider asking the people (who are able) to stand. It is customary for many if not most Protestant congregations to be seated for prayers, including for the longer General Prayers. Assure any who need to remain seated, and those who cannot stand throughout the whole prayer and must sit down during the prayer, that God knows, understands, and appreciates their attempt to stand as long as they could due to respect for him.

A good transitional statement would be, “In the Bible God has not commanded a specific posture for communicating with him in prayer. We see in his Word that one of the most common positions for prayer was standing, and as we stand in the presence of people to whom we should show respect (e.g., when the judge enters in a court of law), so we honor God, who is most worthy of respect, in prayer. Let all of us, who are able to do so

comfortably, stand. [Raise your hands as you ask the congregation to stand.] Let us pray.”⁵

1) In the Bible we see people praying in all the following positions:

- a) standing (1 Kings 8:22; Luke 18:13);⁶
- b) sitting (1 Chronicles 17:16; Luke 10:13);
- c) kneeling (Daniel 6:10; Acts 20:36);
- d) bowing down (Exodus 34:8; Psalm 95:6);
- e) prostrate on the ground (2 Samuel 12:16; Matthew 26:39); and
- f) with uplifted hands (Psalm 28:2; 1 Timothy 2:8).

2) Kneeling benches are provided in many churches for those who can kneel. Keep in mind that not everyone is able to kneel without difficulty and/or pain. Yet, kneeling is a conventional way to demonstrate and foster the humility and contrition that pleases God. However, those qualities of the heart are not automatically produced by kneeling, and they can be present in a worshiper praying in the other positions.

3) **DISCUSS:** Can using a variety of positions for prayer in your congregation enrich your corporate worship? If your congregation has not used any of these procedures for prayer, it would be good before introducing them to discuss doing so with the elders. See Lessons Eight and Nine for more helpful information.

- b. Some pastors and worship leaders who lead the congregation in the General Prayers, come to the steps leading up to the chancel, turn and face the chancel as do the people in the congregation, kneel (at the communion rail if there is one) and offer the prayer thus conveying in a strong visual and emotive manner that the pastor or worship leader is part of and leading the worshipers before the Lord. Of course, this same sense is conveyed, especially in liturgical churches that only permit ordained clergy to be in the pulpit, when these prayers are offered from the pulpit. A human being is present in that part of the sanctuary that architecturally corresponds to the most holy part of the temple, where God was present.
- c. Ask God to work through us (his people here assembled) to help resolve any of the matters mentioned in the intercessory part of the prayer. Ask him to enable us to serve in

⁵ In some congregations such a change may be so innovative that it should be preceded by preparing the congregation first. See Lesson Nine, “Helpful Steps for Trying Something New.

⁶ English theologian and Duke Divinity School professor, Geoffrey Wainwright, referencing the late second and early third century church theologian, Tertullian, has written that “as early as the second century, Easter extended forward into a ‘most joyous season’ of fifty days. During the entire seven weeks of Eastertide, Christians did not kneel for prayer but rather stood in order to mark the heavenly location of believers in the risen and exalted Christ, in anticipation of the general resurrection....” Geoffrey Wainwright, “The Origins of the Christian Year,” in Robert E. Webber, Editor, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship: The Services of the Christian Year*, Volume 5 (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), p. 87.

any way we can in any other issue mentioned in the prayer, especially when speaking of a specific concern.

d. Provide a time of silence in corporate worship. (Deuteronomy 27:9; Psalm 62:5 [NASB, NRSV]; Habakkuk 2:20)

- 1) Remember what we learned in Lesson One, that worship primarily involves a dialogue between God and his people. We need to facilitate that dialogue by providing times of silence where God can speak to people by guiding their thoughts in silence and in other ways.
- 2) Before pausing and providing a time of silence, it is important to make a brief introductory transitional statement explaining the Biblical basis for and value of this period of silence and offering some guidance as to how to most effectively use that time of silence. Doing so will allay the fears of some people who feel uncomfortable in times of silence and help them experience the benefits of that time of quiet listening, reflection, meditation, and prayer. In some congregations, soft background music without lyrics is used to facilitate such meditation and prayer.
- 3) Carefully monitor the time of such period of silence. Don't rush it and make it too brief to be meaningful and effective, and don't err on the opposite side and let it go on too long.

e. In the Prayer of Confession facilitating the involvement of the congregation can be done in several ways.

1) Some congregations use this transition into the Prayer of Confession using 1 John 1:5-7 (or 5-9); 7-9, 10. It is very effective to read the verses in this passage antiphonally, such as in this manner:

Pastor (P): "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth."

Congregation (C): "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

P: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

C: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."

P: Let us pray.

2) The Prayer of Confession itself can be offered in a number of meaningful ways.

- a) After a brief beginning of the prayer asking God to forgive common sins of commission and omission, the pastor asks God to hear our silent prayers of particular sins we have committed (allowing at least 30 seconds for the congregation to do so), after which the pastor concludes the prayer.
 - b) Occasionally, sing a hymn of confession, such as “Not What My Hands Have Done.” (Text: Horatius Bonar; Tune: George William Martin)
 - c) Print a responsive prayer of confession in the bulletin and have the leader and the congregation prayerfully read it antiphonally.
- 3) People come to corporate worship keenly aware of their need for forgiveness of their sins. We long to hear that God forgives us. Thus, as we saw above, immediately after the Prayer of Confession an Assurance of Pardon must follow.
- a) Since we need to hear from God that we are forgiven, it is most important that the Assurance of Pardon be passages from God’s Word where God is assuring his people of their forgiveness. Such passages include the following:
 - Psalm 32:1-2 and 3-5; 108:8-12; 130:3,4,7
 - Isaiah 43:25; 44:21-22
 - Isaiah 53:4-6 (or, if brevity is required, just verses 4a and 6c)
 - Jeremiah 31:31-34 (cf. Hebrews 8:8-12); 33:8
 - Luke 1:68, 77
 - John 3:16 (Use with “only begotten,” e.g., in NASB, KJV; 8:34-36.)
 - Acts 10:43; 13:38-39
 - Romans 5:1-2; 5:8-9; 8:1
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17-19
 - Ephesians 1:7-8
 - Colossians 1:11-14; 2:13-14
 - 1 Timothy 1:15, 17
 - 1 Peter 2:24
 - 1 John 1:5-7 (or 5-9); 7-9
 - b) After the reading of the Old Testament passages, and also the New Testament verses, a special blessing from the Lord is received when a statement such as these that follow is said. Many people find additional significance in hearing these words from an ordained minister, who is called by God to speak his Word. In lieu of a pastor, a similar blessing is received when an elder, who is also ordained, proclaims these comforting words as well. Nevertheless, they also may be proclaimed effectively by a mature lay worship leader appointed by the authorized church council. In all cases, issue the proclamation from the chancel, in particular from the pulpit or the lectern (preferably with a large Bible on it that can be clearly seen by the congregation), the architecturally significant link with the Holy of Holies (where God was present) in the Israelites’ temple.

- 1- “In Jesus Christ we are forgiven and made righteous; believe this Gospel and go forth to live in peace.”
- 2- “Dear friends, believe this good news that is ours because of Christ, and go forth in peace and in joy.”⁷
- 3- Consider doing, as is done in congregations within a liturgical tradition where the clergy have a sacerdotal function, including a statement by the ordained pastor, immediately after reading one of the applicable passages from the Bible that assure forgiveness, such as this one: “As God has sent his only-begotten Son to take upon himself all our sins, whereby through faith in him we are credited with his righteousness, therefore as your pastor called and ordained in Christ Jesus to proclaim his grace to you, on behalf of him, I declare that you [or preferably we] are forgiven of your [our] sins [OR I declare to you God’s Word that we are forgiven] in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” Ordained pastors make this statement very effectively when they make the sign of the cross with their right hand while saying those words. If this manner of offering the Assurance of Pardon is used, it is necessary to make a statement like this one where the congregation clearly sees that the forgiveness is coming from the Lord Jesus Christ through the pastor he has called to make that proclamation. Ministers in liturgical churches typically have access to their denominational liturgy, which likely has specific words to say at that point in the service.

After the pastor makes this statement, the congregation responds with a reply such as, “Thanks be to God!”

- If this type of Assurance of Pardon is employed carefully, much of value can be experienced by the worshipers. Hearing an authorized fellow human being assure us of our forgiveness in the first person, in a way whereby the pastor is speaking with authority from the Lord and clearly in behalf of Christ, who has called the pastor to do so, provides comfort and encouragement in a special way. In so doing, the global church may recover much that has been lost, especially in contemporary Protestant denominations highly influenced by the unbiblical egalitarianism rampant in our times particularly in Western culture, by understanding the meaning of clergy ordination in [historic Christian theology](#).
- f. In the General Prayers, pause to provide worshipers the opportunity to pray for matters of concern to them. Several means for doing so have been done throughout the world and over the centuries. You need not use these suggestions all the time, but sometimes, especially when certain circumstances arise, it is good to do one or more of the following.

⁷ Many other Bible texts and general statements assuring the worshipers of their pardon are found in *The Worship Sourcebook* copublished by The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Faith Alive Christian Resources, and Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, pp. 115-125.

- 1) Simply allow a brief period of silence for people to include their own praises, thanksgivings, intercessions, and personal requests. A transitional statement alerting the congregation when to do so, can be words such as these: “And now, O Lord, please hear our individual [offerings of praise], [thanksgivings], [petitions]....”
- 2) After alerting the congregation at the beginning of the prayer, at specific points guide the worshipers to pray for specific matters (called bidding prayers); invite those who wish to do so to pray out loud and ask the rest to pray in silence. Assure all that neither is less nor more effective, for it’s Christ’s righteousness credited to us by faith (Romans 4:3, 11, 23-25) that makes our prayers “powerful and effective.” (James 5:16)
 - a) Offer suggestions and then pause for a period of silence (e.g., 15-30 seconds) to allow the members to formulate their own expressions on that subject. For example, in the section on supplication the worship leader could say, “We pray for those who’ve lost their homes and businesses in the devastating floods in the South; please hear our individual petitions we now bring to you.”
 - b) Having been informed at the beginning of the prayer, and/or in the bulletin for the day, and/or on a PowerPoint slide during the prayer, people can be given the opportunity to respond at specific points in the prayer as the worship leader prays for specific subjects, and then periodically gives the congregation a transitional statement such as, “Lord in your mercy...,” then pausing, indicating the congregation’s response, “Please hear our prayer, O Lord.”
- g. Occasionally praying the General Prayers using the Lord’s Prayer in a bidding prayer format as described above, helps people have a more active part in the congregational prayer (the General Prayers) and feel more included in and part of a dialogue with God.

Placement of the Prayers in a Worship Service

5. Next ask, “Where in the worship service should these prayers be offered?” Let’s consider them one at a time in the Biblical light of the logic of the liturgy.
 - a. Turn the flipchart to the model of worship used in Lesson Two. Should we keep the Prayer of Confession where it is? The other three parts of prayer can be included in the General Prayers. Should we keep them where they are in the order of service?
 - 1) If some want to put the prayers elsewhere, especially in their congregation, do not object if they can give a Biblical reason for such a placement. The main point is to make sure the different types of prayer are included and in a sequence that is meaningful to the people and that is consistent with the six Biblical principles for planning worship (Lesson Four) and the rest of the Bible.
 - 2) Consider carefully the logic of the liturgy that has been used throughout the history of the church, which is being explained in this worship manual. Remind the participants of the importance of planning a worship service that honors and glorifies God by

proceeding in an orderly manner (1 Corinthians 14:30) according to his Word and that is logical, meaningful, inspiring, and encouraging to the people. The order of the parts of the worship service must help the people understand why they are doing what they are doing in this service, in this lesson pertaining to the prayers offered, to glorify God who is most holy and to facilitate the accomplishment of his purposes. Since God has created us in his image, which includes our rationality, we find meaning in that which is significant and logical. Such worship helps attract and maintain people's attendance and attention.

- 3) For doing so, it is good to write out our prayers. Some pastors and other people think that being able to stand up and pray spontaneously in public is a mark of spiritual maturity and excellence. Not necessarily. In well over half a century as an ordained pastor, and for a quarter of a century before that, I have not observed evidence of such a correlation. I've known many people who can do such spontaneous unprepared public praying, and their prayers, while usually genuine and sincere, are often disconnected, redundant, and too lengthy. (Cf. Matthew 6:7) Do such prayers honor God?

Do they honor the image of God which he has built into our human nature? Do they engage people's minds as well as their hearts? Reasons exist, some of which are mentioned below, that other pastors and worship leaders, who are also spiritually mature and excellent, offer genuine and sincere prayers when they have taken the time to prepare them ahead of time. Their carefully worded prayers are much more appreciated, and they significantly better express the worshipers' adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Further, they honor God in so doing. These pastors and worship leaders also are able to stand up and offer genuine and sincere prayers spontaneously when they have to do so in moments when they have had no time to prepare. In fact, since they typically take time to prepare ahead, think carefully about, and write out their prayers, since they have spent so much time and effort in such preparation, when they do have to pray spontaneously, they often, if not always, have much thoughtful content in their prayers.

- b. Next, mention to the class that it is good to include other prayers as well. Three other prayers often used in Christian worship services are the following:
 - 1) A Prayer called the Invocation, typically offered at the beginning of the worship service, represents the people's thanking God for calling us to come to him, and Christ Jesus in particular, for making it possible for us to be in his holy, holy, holy as well as loving presence, and then invoking (asking, petitioning, requesting) God to do the following:
 - a) to be present in this service of worship (which is actually not necessary, and shouldn't be done, since God is the one who has called his people to gather for his worship and, being omnipresent, he is already here),
 - b) to speak to all the people assembled what we need to hear,
 - c) to be pleased with what we have come to say and do and to guide us to do so, and

- d) to help us respond in faith and obedience in this worship service, throughout the coming week, and always.
- A LARGELY RHETORICAL QUESTION: Where should this prayer be placed in the order of service? (If guidance is needed, mention that when a Prayer of Invocation is offered, it is usually given at the beginning of the service. It is typically and logically the people's response to the Call to Worship from God's Word, since it is he who has called us to come together to worship him and to bless us in so doing.)
- 2) Many churches include a prayer called the Prayer for Illumination, which is offered by the pastor, or a worship leader, prior to reading the Bible passage(s) upon which the Sermon that comes next is based, and requests the Holy Spirit to do the following:
- a) to grant understanding in the reading from the Bible,
- b) to grant the light of his wisdom and guidance for the pastor who speaks, and
- c) to grant wisdom for those who hear, that the Bible text upon which the sermon is based will be explained truthfully, clearly understood, and applied as God wills. For my own sermons, writing, and other work, I pray that God guides me, so that I say all he would have me say, not one word more and not one word less. Sometimes Psalms 19:14 (which many pray word for word or with slight adaptation) and 119:105 are used as the Prayer for Illumination.
- Some pastors, typically use Psalm 19:14 as the Prayer of Illumination: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer." Yet, in their use of this text in corporate worship, they change the second, third, and fourth "my" to "our" and make "heart" plural, in order to include everyone in the service; thereby saying,
- "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] hearts be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer. Amen."
- DISCUSS: Where should this beautiful prayer, asking God to guide our reflections on the meaning, understanding, and application of his Word in our lives, be placed in the order of service? (If guidance is needed, mention that when a Prayer of Illumination is offered, it is usually given just before the reading from the Bible or before the sermon. Where do you think it should come, and why?)
- 3) One wise and beautiful Christian practice in corporate worship is to include a prayer called the Prayer for Blessing on the Word in which (usually) the pastor leads the congregation in requesting God's help for us to obey the Word, applying that aspect of it that was taught in the sermon to our daily lives fully in accord with the Lord's will.
- DISCUSS: Should this prayer be placed in the order of service where it is in the model? Is there any better place? Where do you think it should come, and why? (If guidance is needed, mention that when a prayer for blessing on the Word is

offered, it is usually and logically prayed just after the sermon and led by the pastor who delivered the sermon.)

6. The following reproduction of the model in Lesson Two shows recommended placements for the prayers (underlined) that have been discussed in this lesson.

GATHERING TO GOD

- [God] Call to Worship (From God's Word; see Appendix A)
[People] Prayer of Invocation (Including Adoration)
 Psalms/Hymns/Songs (Praise)
 Prayer of Confession
[G] Assurance of Pardon (From God's Word; see also Appendix A)
 The Law and/or Summary of the Law
[P] Psalm/Hymn/Song (Thanksgiving/Praise/Preparation for Message)

PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD

- [P] Prayer for Illumination
[G] Bible Reading
 Sermon/Message
[P] Prayer for Blessing on the Word
[G, P] Passing the Peace
[G] Sacraments
 Baptism
 Lord's Supper (Eucharist/Communion)

RESPONDING TO GOD

- [P] Confession of Faith (Creed)
 Commitment to Obey God's Word Offering
 Psalm/Hymn/Song (Thanksgiving)
 General Prayers (Adoration, Thanksgiving, Supplication)
 Psalm/Hymn/Song (Application)

GOD'S SENDING OF US TO SERVE HIM

- [G] Benediction (From God's Word; see Appendix A)
[P] Lives lived in service to God throughout the week (Romans 12:1-2)

Principles for Preparing and Leading Corporate Prayer

7. Ask the large group to identify other guidelines for preparing and leading corporate prayer most effectively. Write them on the flipchart as they are mentioned. After discussing them, include any of the following that have not been stated.
- a. It is necessary to prepare ahead of time carefully.

- 1) Ask the participants to return to their groups of four and discuss this question: What benefits can you identify for preparing the prayers ahead of time? Add any of the following that the participants do not mention in their small group reports.
- 2) There are several benefits of preparation for pastors, worship leaders, and the congregation.
 - a) It is a great blessing to be called to bring the needs of the saints in the global church militant, and in particular all those in the present congregation, before the Lord. Preparation assures being able to include all the subjects you, and they, want to cover and minimizes the possibility of forgetting something important.
 - b) The wording can be more creative and pleasing to hear, avoiding trite and repetitive expressions. Most all church leaders can stand up and pray spontaneously, but a carefully thought through prayer is especially meaningful and moving, facilitating the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Use either notes or a manuscript. (The latter is even more effective.) Practicing the prayer ahead of time enables you offer the prayer without it sounding like you are reading it, and you think of additional important matters to add during your preparation.

You can always add spontaneously thoughts that occur at the time of praying a prepared prayer, but be careful in doing so to not be trite, repetitive, or unnecessarily lengthy. Sometimes less is more; this is one of those times. As I prepare my prayers and the sermon, I typically pray, “Dear God, please guide me in the words I select that I say all you would have me say—not one word more and not one word less.”

Such time in preparation of this vital part of corporate worship enables the worship leader to ask God for what should be included in the prayer, which is a blessing in itself for the leader; to reflect on the needs of the church, the community, the nation, and the rest of the world that should be included; and to offer the prayer on the part of the people with the proper emphases, so the worshipers can relate, and feel that these words expressed to God are their own, not only their cognitive reflections but also their heartfelt praises, contrition, thanksgivings, pleas and requests for others and themselves. Strive for a healthy balance: expressions to God that are cognitively meaningful and with affect but which avoids apathetic dullness on the one hand and excessive emotion on the other.

- c) There are several benefits of preparation for the whole congregation.
 - 1- Hearing their important needs brought before the Lord facilitates and motivates their meeting with him. Doing so enables them to sense they are connecting with God, helps them engage in communicating with him, gives them great joy, and enables them to feel loved, valued, and cherished by God and his people.
 - 2- The Lord’s answering of their prayers brings treasured blessings.

- 3- The words of the prayer are more appreciated since they include less redundancy and trite expressions.
- 4- I heard from a colleague one day that the pastor of her church writes out his prayers ahead of time and reads them in the worship service. She said that the excellence of the pastor's prayers is one reason she was attracted to that church and to join it.

b. Pray in the first person plural. Why should we pray in the first person plural?

- 1) Remember that the Bible portrays corporate worship as the gathering of the people of God to renew their covenant promises in the celebration of Christ's life, suffering, death, and resurrection. We are leading the people in their communication with God; therefore we should not, as is frequently done, pray in the first person singular, e.g., "Dear Lord, I pray that...." We are helping the whole congregation pray. They feel more included, and sense that they are praying, if the pastor or other worship leader is praying in the first person plural, e.g., "Dear Lord, we pray that...." The person offering the prayer aloud is not the only one praying, while all the rest are just listening and with each one wondering, "If he's (or she's) doing the praying, what am I doing?"
- 2) Consider the prayers in the Psalms. When the first person singular is employed, e.g., Psalm 5, the one praying is doing so in the well-understood context of the Hebrew concept of the corporate personality. In the Old Testament period, the Hebrew mentality was that the patriarch, the head of the clan, represented all the others in the clan, both male and female. Jacob was not only himself, Jacob, but Israel (e.g., Genesis 32:28; 35:9-10, 21-22). The family of those patriarchs who did well were blessed as a whole, and in other families, not only the patriarchal head who did evil but also his family received the judgment that came because of his evil deeds (e.g., Joshua 7), which they typically did not oppose and did themselves for generations. (Deuteronomy 5:9)

Thus, those of us in the context of a highly individualistic Western cultural worldview and mentality, when we read the Psalms and other Old Testament texts, where one is praying in the first person singular in corporate worship, we must understand those words corporately and help others to do so as well. In our own leadership in worship at this point in history, we should pray in the first person plural so the people assembled for the service sense their inclusion, as God's Word intends (e.g., Genesis 12:3c; Galatians 3:26-29), just as we generally use inclusive language today so girls and women feel included, even though the Bible was written in a patriarchal cultural worldview with the male pronoun used generically, and as did our own literature until recent times.

- 8. Ask if all the groups have completed their assigned tasks and are ready for the worship service that will be conducted during Lesson Six. If they have not completed their work, and if time remains, allow the worship planning groups to finish their preparations. If you don't have time in this session for the groups to work, remind them to keep proceeding on their own in order to accomplish their tasks before the next session begins, including setting up for

the service. Also, ask them to include any changes they want to make as a result of what they've learned in this lesson. Offer to provide help for the groups outside of class if they need your assistance.

9. For any of the cognitive objectives you have not as yet observed the stated behavior, distribute file cards as needed, and ask the students to give you the stipulated responses. Be sure to ask them to sign their name on each card. Or, you can verbally ask the class, corporately in session or selected representative individuals, and/or those about whom you have a special concern, in or outside the class (especially outside and individually for those about whom you are concerned in order to avoid embarrassment and to facilitate their responses), to do the behaviors specified in the objectives. Review the instruction as needed, for any objectives that are not accomplished as you intend them to be. Doing so in class, will help those who need the remedial help and be a good memory refresher and reinforcer for those who have accomplished the objectives.

Action Plan Steps for Lesson Five

10. For the remaining time in this session, continue to construct your Action Plans. First individually, then in your groups of four, reflect on the following questions:
 - a. In the light of what we've been learning from the Bible today, what do I need to do at home?
 - b. What time(s) of day can I set aside to pray and study the Bible?
 - c. What time of the week can I set aside to pray and to plan the prayers I will offer in the next worship service I lead?
 - d. What can I do that will help worshipers respond in ways that will please God?
11. Next time we will use the principles we've been studying to engage in a worship service.
12. Offer a closing prayer asking God's help to apply what has been learned in this lesson as he would have us do in the church(es) we are serving.

Experiencing Corporate Worship

Needs of the Learners:

1. Felt Needs:
 - a. See Lesson One section on felt needs.
 - b. Include here the needs the students identified in Lesson One that are applicable to the subjects in this lesson.
2. Unfelt Needs:

All the students need to learn the Biblical teaching on and how to implement the following competencies:

 - a. The ability to lead in Christian corporate public worship.
 - b. The ability to evaluate and improve upon their work.

Goal: This lesson will focus on conducting and debriefing the worship service the students have been planning during the first five lessons to celebrate in this session. At the conclusion of this session the participants will add to their specific Action Plan ways to implement these teachings of the Bible in the church congregation(s) they are serving.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson each participant will be able to do the following:

1. Fulfill all his or her responsibilities in the worship service the students in the class have been preparing during the first five sessions of this course in order to conduct in the sixth session and explain, verbally or in writing, where in the worship service his or her part occurred and at least one reason why it is in that place according to the Bible and the logic of the historic Christian liturgy.
2. Participate in a class debriefing session, and identify in writing on a 3 x 5 card at least one aspect of his or her part in the worship service that his or her group and instructor affirms was well done, and any aspects that were not well done. For any that should be improved, he or she will cite at least one change, and any others, that should be made that in order to make the necessary improvement in that part of the worship service.
3. By the end of the course, at least 75% of the class members will demonstrate their affective interest by asking at least one question or making at least one positive comment in class, or with the teacher at break times, either verbally or in writing.
4. By the end of this course, at least 75% of the class will report to the teacher, verbally or in writing,
 - a. that they feel more confident in planning corporate Christian worship, including their ability to explain the Biblical elements of such church worship and their placement in the worship service in accord with the logic of the liturgy,
 - b. and that they feel more motivated and able to implement the needed changes in the worship practices of their congregation.
5. By the next lesson, at least half of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via email, by regular mail, or on a 3 x 5 card) that they have talked with least one other person in the church(es) they serve about least one modification they want to make in the church's(es') corporate worship.
6. Within three months of the end of this course, at least 75% of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via text, via email or by regular mail) that they have

implemented in their congregation's worship services at least three aspects of corporate Christian worship that they learned in this course.

7. Add to the Action Plan for the church(es) he or she is serving at least one idea from this lesson that he or she wants to implement and at least one SMART step to do so.
8. Within three months of the end of this course, all the students will have begun to implement at least three elements of their Action Plan pertaining to this lesson within the congregation(s) they serve.

Materials Needed

1. The first three materials listed in Lesson One.
 2. At least one 3 x 5 file card for each participant. These are always helpful for many purposes.
 3. Any equipment and other resources needed for the worship service in this session.
- Plan to arrive at the site of this lesson and where the worship service will be conducted well before the others are scheduled to come. Give yourself time to make sure that all of the necessary set up has been done by the Order of Service Group prior to this lesson.

Introduction

Mention that in order to most effectively learn how to plan worship according to the Bible, it is important to begin doing so during the course, while they are still with us. Students need to begin applying theory to practice, to demonstrate what educators refer to as learning transfer, and what this professor and author also calls going from the text to the turf, based on the Biblical principle, the Scriptural major motif, of the unity of Word and deed. As their teachers, we need to observe that they are accomplishing the objectives of the course. Both teachers and students need to see that the latter are able to apply in their ministries what they have learned. In so doing, we are still here to help them with any corrective feedback required which will facilitate their understanding of what they yet need to know, do, and how to do it, in order to construct a worship service that results in honoring the Triune God, assuring forgiveness, glorifying Christ, edifying worshipers, renewing covenant obligations, and offering hope.

A Service for the Worship of God

1. Also mention that, as we've discussed, in this workshop you'll conduct the service of worship that you've been planning. Ask the Order of Service Group to present the order they've planned (turning to the flipchart page where they've previously written it).
2. Conduct the service of worship as it has been planned.

Debriefing the Worship Service

1. Following the worship service, give the participants a break (ca. 30 minutes). Then ask them to reconvene and discuss the service in the group as a whole.

- a. Since people’s emotions have been touched significantly in their worship (either positively or negatively) and are at a heightened level, first ask them to express the feelings they had during their worship experience. The main reason for starting with this question is that our feelings about an experience are typically at the surface of our consciousness and most dominant in our consideration of what we have just encountered. Beginning the debriefing by letting people reflect on and discuss how they feel, facilitates further and deeper cognitive reflection in the following questions.

After discussion of our emotional response to an event, we can then more easily and effectively reflect upon it. For example, did they sense they were in the presence of the Triune God, who is most holy and who loves them?

- b. Next, ask the following questions:

- 1) What occurred in the service? Clarify that you’re not asking for a listing of the elements in the order of service; you’re asking the group to discuss what they experienced. (WHAT?)
 - a) Did you sense that you were having a dialogue with God?
 - b) What part of the worship service did you find most meaningful? Why?
 - c) Would you do anything differently? If so, what else would you do?
 - d) Refer to the applicable items in Appendix D—A Checklist for Corporate Worship Planning and Preparation.
- 2) What is the significance of what you did in planning and participating in the worship service? (SO WHAT?)
 - a) Was it a personally meaningful time with God?
 - b) How did God speak to you during this worship service? What did he say? Here mention to the group: It’s OK to answer this question in your own mind without sharing the answer with anyone else; just think about it. However, if anyone would like to share your answer(s) with the rest of the group, feel welcome to do so. Now, give a brief time of silence to allow the attendees to think.
 - c) Was it helpful in learning a Biblical model of corporate Christian worship?
- 3) Now what will you do at home in your worship services? (NOW WHAT?)*
 - a) Here is another question to think about for a moment, without having to share your answer(s) with others: Were you challenged to life differently as a result of

* Ted W. Ward, “Debriefing Guide,” in Michigan State University course, “ED 823 Instructional Simulation,” January 26, 1976. The applications of this guide to worship are mine, including with feedback from associates and students.

God's message to you in the worship service? If so, how? Take a moment to think. Allow a brief time for reflection before proceeding.

- b) What do you want to do differently as a worship leader in the church(es) you are serving?
3. For the cognitive objectives, if you have not as yet observed the stated behaviors, distribute file cards as needed, and ask the students to give you the stipulated responses. Be sure to ask them to sign their name on each card. Or, you can verbally ask the class, corporately in session or selected representative individuals, and/or those about whom you have a special concern, in or outside the class (especially outside and individually for those about whom you are concerned in order to avoid embarrassment and to facilitate their responses), to do the behaviors specified in the objectives. Review the instruction as needed, for any part of an objective that is not accomplished as you have stipulated. Doing so in class, will help those who need the remedial help and also be a good memory refresher and reinforcer for those who have accomplished the objective.

Action Plan Steps for Lesson Six

4. Say to the group, "For the remaining time in this session, continue to construct your Action Plans. First individually, then in your groups of four, reflect on these questions." Write them on the flipchart. Add any other questions that may be helpful.
 - a. Were there any elements of this worship service that I should include in the services I plan from now on?
 - b. Should I make any other changes in our worship services at home?
 - c. What else can I do that will help participants worship God?
5. Now that we have planned a worship service it is important that we ask another question: "Is this worship service one which all God's people, children, teenagers, and adults, will find meaningful?" Our next lesson will examine how to plan worship that will engage all ages and still adhere to the Biblical teachings we've studied in the previous lessons.
6. Close in prayer asking God's help to apply what has been learned in this lesson as he would have us do in the church(es) we are serving.

Intergenerational Worship

Needs of the Learners:

1. Felt Needs:
 - a. See Lesson One section on felt needs.
 - b. Include here the needs the students identified in Lesson One that are applicable to the subjects in this lesson.
 - c. If not included in b., add how can we reach out to and engage teenagers and young adults who do not attend church worship?
2. Unfelt Needs:

All the students need to learn the Biblical teaching on and how to develop and implement the following competencies:

 - a. What the Bible teaches about who God wills to be in his corporate public worship services.
 - b. How children and young people learn to worship.
 - c. What to include in Christian corporate public worship that will engage all ages of God's people.
 - d. The connection between children and young people's experience in corporate worship with the church and their continued connection with the church in the future.

Goal: This lesson will help the global church to plan corporate public worship services that will not only attract, but engage, God's people of all ages in worshipping him. At the conclusion of this session the participants will add to their specific Action Plan ways to implement these teachings of the Bible in their own churches.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson each participant will be able to do the following:

1. Identify and explain, verbally or on a 3 x 5 card, at least three reasons, including at least one passage from the Bible, why it is God's will that all ages engage in his corporate worship.
2. Cite at least three ways, verbally or in writing, that worship leaders can facilitate the engagement in church worship of each age group in the church, children, young people, and adults.
3. Identify and explain, verbally or in writing, at least three ways church leaders can and should facilitate the transition to, or the continuing tradition of, intergenerational worship in their church(es).
4. Identify and explain, verbally or in writing, at least three reasons, including at least two Bible passages, why it is important for children to be part of the corporate worship of God on a regular basis from their earliest years, rather than waiting until they are pre- or early adolescents.
5. During this lesson, the teacher will observe only positive nonverbal feedback (e.g., enthusiasm, excitement, and joy) and hear no complaints when identifying and explaining the meaning, significance, importance, and Biblical basis for including all ages in planning and conducting Christian corporate public worship.
6. By the end of the course, at least 75% of the class members will demonstrate their affective interest by asking at least one question or making at least one positive comment in class, or with the teacher at break times, either verbally or in writing.

7. By the end of this course, at least 75% of the class will report to the teacher, verbally or in writing,
 - a. that they feel more confident in explaining to others the meaning, significance, importance, and Biblical basis for intergenerational corporate worship,
 - b. that they understand the objections of others to intergenerational worship and that they can confidently, caringly, and effectively respond to those objections,
 - c. and that they feel more motivated and able to implement the needed changes pertaining to engaging all ages in the worship planning and practices of their congregation.
8. By the next lesson, at least half of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via email, by regular mail, or on a 3 x 5 card) that they have talked with least one other person in the church(es) they serve about least one modification they want to make in the church's(es') corporate worship pertaining to intergenerational worship.
9. Within three months of the end of this course, at least 75% of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via text, via email or by regular mail) that they have implemented in their congregation's worship services at least three aspects of intergenerational worship that they learned in this course.
10. Add to the Action Plan for the church(es) he or she is serving at least one idea from this lesson that he or she wants to implement and at least one SMART step to do so.
11. Within three months of the end of this course, all the students will have begun to implement at least three elements of their Action Plan pertaining to this lesson within the congregation(s) they serve.

Materials Needed

1. The first three materials listed in Lesson One.
2. At least one 3 x 5 file card for each participant. These are always helpful for many purposes.

Introduction

Churches face a challenge, which is exacerbated in some cultures today, especially those influenced by the West: How do we plan worship services that will engage younger people and still meet the needs of those who are older? Many congregations don't even try, and they simply hold nursery and Sunday school during the worship service(s). Nevertheless, that approach fails to accomplish all that is needed and leaves several important questions which remain, including for example:

1. When children are not present in the worship service, how do they learn, including by experience, that they are part of the covenant community whom God calls to worship him together?
2. How will they learn all the elements of the worship service and develop a deep appreciation for the rich variety in the elements of corporate public worship that cannot be replicated in a Sunday school or children's church setting?
3. How do they develop what psychologists refer to as the "at home" experience that will draw them to God's corporate public worship when they are older?

4. How will they develop the love for and good habit (Hebrews 10:25) of regular worship of God as adults, since they have not seen and/or been a regular part of such worship for as long as they can remember?
5. When the majority of their generational cohort and other younger people are not attending corporate worship, or any other aspect of the life and work of the church, what will attract, motivate, and engage teenagers and young adults to participate in God's worship?
6. How can we understand and lovingly respond to parents' concerns for involving children and youth in corporate church worship?

Further, when a church loses a sense of balance in corporate worship and tilts toward one side or the other, favoring either older or younger people, disharmony typically occurs. If the church favors the young and plans services that the youth want (or, more likely, what they think the youth want), many older people often protest. On the other hand, if the church ignores its youth and doesn't include elements in the worship service that they can relate to and connect with, they protest, many even to the point of refusing to attend.

What about those even younger, the children, including preschoolers? How do you plan a service that will facilitate meaningful and significant worship for them and for adults?

To answer these questions, as all others, we turn to God and his Word. How did families worship in the Bible?

Intergenerational Worship in the Bible

1. Opening: Read a brief Bible passage related to today's lesson; offer prayer. Ask the participants to form groups of four.
 - a. Request that they work first as individuals to examine the following texts. Project the texts (except for the parenthetical content beside them) so all can see, e.g., on a flipchart, chalkboard, overhead projector, or by using a PowerPoint-type program on an LCD projector. Assign each person the study of at least two passages, and ask each to be prepared to explain what the Scriptures mean for including all ages in corporate worship.
 - 1) Exodus 33:7-11 (Note that in v. 8 "all the people" and in v. 10 "all stood and worshiped" means children were included.)
 - 2) Leviticus 23:33-44 (See especially vs. 42-43.)
 - 3) Numbers 10:1-10 (Observe that in vs. 3, 10 "the whole community" is to be involved, including children.)
 - 4) Deuteronomy 15:19-23 (Note especially v. 20.)
 - 5) Deuteronomy 16:9-17 (See especially vs. 11, 14. Children are to be at the feasts [and at the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days!] that their "joy will be complete" [v. 15].)

- 6) Deuteronomy 31:9-13, 31 (Observe especially vs. 12, 13.)
 - 7) Psalm 8 (Notice especially v. 2.) See also Psalm 148:1-14, esp. vss. 12-13.
 - 8) Matthew 18:1-6 (cf. Mark 9:35-37; Luke 9:46-48. How do these texts relate to intergenerational worship in the church? Though likely not a worship experience, Jesus explained the strong connection between welcoming children and welcoming himself into one's presence, exactly what is done in the corporate public worship of God's people.)
 - 9) Matthew 19:13-15 (cf. Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17 [v.15: even babies were included] What does this event have to do with church worship? Though the occasion may not have involved worship, especially corporate worship, it is a clear indication that Jesus wants children in his presence, precisely what occurs the worship of God's covenant people.)
 - 10) Matthew 25:31-40 (esp. v. 40)
 - 11) Luke 2:41-52 (esp. v. 42)
 - 12) John 6:1-13 (v. 9 Jesus used the bread and fish a boy brought to feed the people. How does this passage relate to intergenerational corporate worship? Again, though likely not a worship service, it establishes the fact that a child's presence and contribution are deemed valuable to the Lord.)
 - 13) Acts 20:7-12 (The Greek words for "young man" in vs. 9 and 12 indicate Eutychus was likely from 8-12 years old.) See also Acts 21:5, children.
- b. After five minutes of individual reading and reflection, ask the groups to have each member share with the others in the small group what he or she found in his or her passages.
 - c. After 20 minutes reconvene the small groups into the large group, and ask the reporters to share their group's findings (one at a time per group) for each text. Add any of the information in the parentheses beside the texts in a. above that has not been mentioned in the group reports.
 - **Be sure to point out that the Bible passages clearly show that all the people in God's covenant community, from the youngest child to the oldest adult, participated in Israel's and the church's corporate worship events.**

Intergenerational Worship Today

2. Summarize what we have just seen in the Scriptures: that God has always intended for children and all other age groups to be a part of the corporate worship of his covenant people.

- a. Ask the participants how they communicate to their congregation that the inclusion of children in God's corporate worship is expected. Add any of the following that are not mentioned:
 - 1) An official statement appearing each week in the bulletin from the church board welcoming the children to the worship services of the church. It is necessary to repeat this notice at each public worship service for several reasons, including as a reminder for everyone that it's important for God's children to participate in his worship, as information for visitors, and to indicate where parents and children can obtain additional resources, such as paper and pencils for taking notes during the sermon.
 - 2) A statement regularly given from the lead pastor from the pulpit with a warm explanation of relevant passages from the Bible.
 - 3) A sermon on the inclusion of children when the covenant community met for corporate worship in the Bible.
 - 4) A newsletter article.
 - 5) A special class in the adult education program.
- b. Next, ask the participants to answer this question, first individually for 10 minutes and then in their groups: "What are you doing now in your worship services in your home church that will engage all ages, including young children, older children, teenagers, young adults, middle age adults, and older adults?"
- c. After 10 minutes ask the groups to reconvene as one large group and their recorders to state, one at a time per group until all have reported, what they are doing in their churches to include children and teenagers as well as adults in their worship services. Project the responses recorders give so all can see and record them.

Planning Worship that Will Engage All Generations

3. Now ask the attendees to focus on this question, first individually for 10 minutes and then in their small groups: "In the light of what we've studied in the Bible in this session and in our previous lessons, and from what we've just heard that others are doing, what modifications can we make in our public church worship services to include all ages so everyone can feel meaningfully involved and sense that he or she is in God's presence and in dialogue with him?" (NOTE: Consider suggesting that they organize themselves into three new groups for this task on the basis of their interest: [1] a group for those who prefer to focus on children, [2] another group for those who want to think about teenagers, and [3] a third group for those who wish to concentrate on adults.)
 - a. After 30 minutes, ask all to reconvene and for the reporters to share their group's work, one group and one subject area (e.g., involving children) at a time. List the responses on the device you used in 2.c. above.

- b. When all the groups have reported, add any of the following that were not mentioned by them, many of which have been done in other churches to include all ages. Don't wait until the end and add all these at once; mention them after all the groups have reported on a particular age range (e.g., children, teenagers). Don't overwhelm the group with too many ideas. Select from the following list several that seem most helpful. Some opportunities for service that younger people can do are repeated in the listing for older people. For example, some opportunities for children that teenagers can do are repeated in the youth section in order to save very busy youth workers time, so they can use just the section for teens without having to look through the listing for other age groups.

Engaging Children in Corporate Worship

As Leaders and Special Contributors

- 1) Older children can be asked to offer a prayer in the service.
- 2) Older children, who read well, can be taught to read with expression and to read the Bible lesson before the sermon. Variations of this involvement of children include one or more children reading the text in different languages in addition to English and a child reciting the Bible text from memory with special emphasis, voice inflections, and gestures that help communicate the text accurately. All ages should do so.
- 3) Children, who play a musical instrument well, can be asked to do so in the worship service, either individually or as part of an ensemble that practices and contributes regularly, or to accompany a psalm, hymn, or song. Even young children can learn to play a hand drum, such as a djembe.
- 4) A children's choir/music ministry could be formed and sing several times a year in worship services. The choir can also sing with the adult choir antiphonally.
- 5) Older children can usher, hand out children's bulletins, and pass the offering plates.
- 6) Where the church approves, older children can pass the offering plates. Some churches require only ordained deacons to serve in this capacity, so be sure to consult the pastor first before asking children to participate in this manner.
- 7) Working alongside adults, children can help clean and set up the sanctuary. Doing so helps them develop a sense of investment in and caring for the worship center where they meet God in a special way in a hallowed setting dedicated to his worship.
- 8) Children can serve as acolytes.
- 9) In services where the congregation comes forward to the chancel or to communion stations during the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and when individual communion cups are used, children can hold a basket or other receptacle and stand with the pastor and others who distribute the elements. Worshipers can then place their individual communion cups in the baskets held by the children.

- 10) Children, who are interested in artwork, can be asked to make a banner for the sanctuary. It would be especially significant to ask their parents to make this a family project with each member of the family participating.
- 11) Children's art also can be used for the cover of the church bulletin. Such a use of children's drawings has been employed especially effectively for the worship folder of a church's family Christmas worship service.
- 12) Children who have special interest in and skills with drawing and other types of art can help with the graphic designs involved with the projection technology needed in worship services.
- 13) A group of older children could prepare dramatic readings of Bible passages on which the sermon is based. Two ways this can be done are acting out a passage in pantomime while it is being read aloud by someone else and by memorizing spoken parts in the text and acting it out in that manner, for example Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).
- 14) Children, together with teenage siblings and their parents, can serve as greeters prior to and after the worship service.
- 15) Children can be invited to express their faith in Jesus Christ, either in an individual expression or by being interviewed by the worship leader. (This gives the congregation an opportunity to learn what Jesus meant when he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:3-4)
- 16) A boy and a girl can each carry a basket of food to the front of the sanctuary during a point in a Thanksgiving service. The two baskets represent gifts of food the congregation has collected for a local food pantry for those who are needy.
- 17) Older children can carry flags of other countries into the sanctuary at the beginning of a worship service that has missions as its theme.
- 18) Children, together with the rest of their family, can participate in lighting a candle in a large Advent wreath in the beginning of a worship service during the season of Advent. One child can light the candle for the day, another can explain the symbolism of that candle, another family member can read a passage from the Bible, and another can lead in prayer. A different family can do so for each of the other Sundays and at Christmas or Christmas Eve. The same can be done with a Lenten triad during the season of Lent; the triad is a triangular base, covered with purple cloth, which contains one candle for each week of Lent.
- 19) A representative sample of children can serve on a Children's Advisory Council or a children's Worship Focus Group to comment on worship services and make suggestions for engaging children more fully in corporate worship.

Participating with Everyone Else

- 1) Encourage families with children, especially those with small children, to sit as close to the front as possible, so the children can more easily see all that is going on and feel a part of the service.
- 2) Five tips from the mother of an infant for his or her participation in corporate worship:¹
 - a) Bring books. It's a quiet activity, and the more interactive the book, the better.
 - b) Have snacks and water. This will keep their little mouths occupied and help stave off any hunger-related temper tantrums.
 - c) Encourage your child to participate. You want to establish good church behavior and set expectations, so allow him or her to sing and read along when appropriate.
 - d) Sit where you can make an exit. Keeping a toddler stationary for an hour or more can be challenging, so find the most opportune time to go for a mid-service walk [e.g., during a hymn or song, or any time that's necessary, even just walking around the back of the sanctuary so you don't miss anything and can still participate in worship].
 - e) Know you're not the only parent going to church. Many people have kids or know kids and understand that they won't be perfect, particularly a toddler, in church. [Yes, and no one expects perfection; all wise church members are glad you and your child are there with them.]
- 3) Singing
 - a) Sing at least one song in each service that the children have learned at home or in their classes.
 - b) Especially include songs the children like to sing.
 - c) Parents pointing to the words on the printed page will help their children learn the songs and help them increase their reading ability! Suggest to parents they explain the meaning of any words the children don't understand.
 - d) Use songs where the lyrics are understandable and relate to the children's experiences.
- 4) On Palm Sunday permit the children to walk through all the aisles in the sanctuary waving palms as the children did during Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem—another joyful way to engage children in Christian corporate public worship.

¹ Shani George, "5 Tips for your little angel's first trip to church," *The Washington Post*, *Loveland Reporter-Herald*, March 7, 2014, p. 11A. Comments in brackets are from Edward Seely.

- 5) Several means can be used to engage children during periods of prayer that will help them feel they are praying:
 - a) Regularly recite memorized prayers (e.g., the Lord’s Prayer).
 - b) Use litanies (written prayers where the leader and congregation speak responsively).
 - c) Include bidding prayers (usually during the General Prayers, where the leader mentions subjects and allows a brief time after each subject for people to offer their prayers either in silence or spoken out loud [e.g., “Now we pray for those who are ill.” Then after a short while, “We pray for those out of work.” Then, “We pray for those who mourn the loss of loved ones.”]).
 - d) Whoever offers prayers should include concerns of children in the prayer (e.g., worries about the well-being of parents and siblings, problems with friends, their health, school subjects).
 - e) When prayers are printed in the bulletin or another source, make them be easy to read, e.g., easy words, short sentences, and, if possible, larger print type (which will also help older adults).²
 - f) Ask the whole congregation to write their prayer needs on a card or mention them to the pastor prior to the congregational prayer (the General Prayers). At that time make a special point to invite the children to do so as well.

- 6) Give children a Children’s Bulletin, which has activities in it, especially activities that are related to the service for the day. For example, it can have a page for younger children who can’t write to just draw a picture of something that they hear in the sermon, a page for older children to answer questions about subjects in the sermon and that explains an aspect of the worship service (such as why we have an offering and telling why their offering is also valuable), and another page for older children for note-taking.

- 7) If a children’s sermon is included in the worship service:
 - a) Sit with the children, but if there are steps leading up to the chancel, sit on the top step so the rest of the congregation can see as well as possible. If projection screens are used, have the cameras on and the children’s sermon on the screen; otherwise most of the congregation may miss gestures, audio-visual aids used, and other helpful communication.
 - b) *Tell stories from the Bible.* God’s Word is a rich treasure of vital and valuable stories of how God has entered history and is working out his plan of salvation and redemption of his creation. Many if not most of the people present (adults as

² See also Carolyn Brown, “Including Children in the Worshipping Congregation.” Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Conference on Liturgy and Music, Denver, Colorado, July 8, 2004.

well as children) will not have heard those stories, and of those who have, important details have faded from their memory, and new insights and applications will occur from hearing those narratives again. We have such little time with God's people to tell the Scriptures, that we cannot fail to employ every occasion to further acquaint them with the Word and facilitate the Holy Spirit's use of those texts in their minds and hearts.³

People come to worship longing to hear God's Word, and if they don't hear it, many don't stay. One pastor, who loved to tell stories from sources outside the Bible for most of his main sermon, also told them each week in his children's sermon. One Sunday during the children's sermon he told several secular stories; he then laughed and said, "That reminds me of a story in the Bible, but I won't go there." A man gasped and looked incredulously at his wife who responded in kind. The couple, who was church shopping, concluded that this church was not going to be their church home, and they joined another congregation. This does not mean secular stories have no place in a sermon—sometimes they do; nevertheless, they should be used sparingly, and the preponderance of our limited time for stories in God's corporate worship should be spent recounting narratives from his Scriptures, which he has called us to teach. In this day when Biblical illiteracy seems to be at an all-time high, we must use every opportunity to foster people's engagement with his Word, and thereby with him!

- c) Whenever children raise their hand, call on them, as much as possible, by name.
- 7) Include the following in the main sermon:
- a) Use the exegetical sermon as your primary practice: explicate and apply the text.
 - b) Use words children can understand. When a complex word or term has to be used, define and explain it, and give an illustration. Those who are unfamiliar with the word or term need this understanding, and those who do know it will appreciate the memory refresher and learn more from what you add.
 - c) Use examples children can relate to and that include children as well as those who are older.
 - d) Make sure at least one point in the sermon applies to children, and specify for the children what that point is, including what it means for their lives.⁴
 - e) Provide an outline of the sermon in the bulletin.

³ While it is vital to teach the Bible stories, that necessity doesn't mean we should never tell other stories, especially when they help illustrate a Biblical passage; however, for the most part it is good to save these other stories for other occasions and even then, use the ones that are exceptional and excellent.

⁴ Three of these concepts are adapted from Carolyn Brown, "Preaching God's Word to Us AND Our Children." Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Conference on Liturgy and Music, Denver, Colorado, July 9, 2004.

- f) Use visual aids in the sermon.
 - g) Provide some questions in the church bulletin under the title of the sermon that give the children and others specific subjects to listen for that will be included in the sermon.
 - h) Pastors, especially in contemporary services, engage children, youth, and adults by at least occasionally raising a question for the congregation to discuss with one or two others around them for about a minute. The pastor then asks for volunteers to share one point that came out of their discussion. The most effective questions contain words children and youth can understand and subjects to which they can relate. Invite these younger worshippers also to respond, and be sure to call upon those who raise their hand.
 - i) Keep the children's sermon short: the children have limited attention spans (as do many teens and adults).
- 8) Children should be encouraged to give during the offering *from what they have earned*. The understanding of offering what they are giving to God and their involvement in doing so is enhanced if the congregation brings their gifts to the communion table or another designated place in the chancel.
- 9) Invite the whole congregation to say certain things at specific points during the service, for example:
- a) Saying "Amen" following the words, "through Jesus Christ, our Lord" at the end of prayers.
 - b) Saying "Please hear our prayer." at specific points in the General Prayers. (See Lesson Five.)
 - c) Saying "Thanks be to God" after the Bible reading when the person who was reading concludes the Bible reading by saying, "This is the Word of the Lord."
 - d) Reciting a confession of faith, such as the Apostles' Creed, and a commitment to obey directly engages children in an edifying experience and important witness to any visitors who may not be Christians. Over time they memorize the creed and have it for use in individual reflection, for witnessing to others, and for teaching.
 - Allow children who want to make a personal confession of faith to do so as well. Those who have had an especially significant experience in their faith can be allowed to share it with the congregation in the response to God's Word, or at the end of the service, followed by a congregational expression of thanksgiving to God.
- 10) Reading Bible passages responsively (where the leader and the congregation take turns reading the verses aloud) involves children and all ages together. Use antiphonal readings for the Bible lesson, such as in Psalm 136, where the worship leader reads one part of the verse and the congregation reads the refrain, or where the

choir reads one part and the rest of the congregation reads the refrain. Even small children can learn to say the refrain, thus feeling themselves being a part of the service. Invite the children to do so.

- 11) Read the Bible in the children's native language and in other languages they understand.
- 12) Participating in the sacraments engages children and employs all five senses to help them worship and learn.
 - a) Being baptized themselves, if they weren't as infants, facilitates a life changing relationship with God and marks them as members of his covenant people, the body of Christ.
 - b) Gather the children around the baptismal font, or other location, whenever Baptism is celebrated.
 - c) Partaking of the Lord's Supper when old enough to understand its meaning connects children with Christ and fellow believers in a profound and life shaping experience. Some churches do not permit children who haven't made confession of faith to receive the elements, but they do invite the children to come to the front of the sanctuary for a special blessing when the congregation comes to the communion rail and kneels. The pastor then lays his or her hands on and blesses the children who do not receive the elements.
- 13) During warmer weather, especially in the summertime, hold an outdoor intergenerational worship service. The less formal milieu permits children to move around more freely as they sense the need to do so.
- 14) Greet children as well as older people after the service. Warmly express delight that they were present in the worship of the Lord. Ask them questions about themselves, including what they enjoy most about the worship service, what else they like to do and are enjoying, how they are doing in school, and what they are looking forward to in the days ahead.

Engaging Teenagers in Corporate Worship

As Leaders and Special Contributors

- 1) Those teens with skills in music and leadership can lead in the singing of hymns, psalms, and songs. They can teach a new song to the congregation, in particular one that they especially enjoy, that is applicable to all ages, and that most others will find meaningful. It should not only be Biblical and theologically sound, but fit with the theme of the service that day, which has been or will be, expounded by the sermon.
- 2) Teenagers can be asked to offer a prayer in the service. With the help of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of a pastor or worship leader, the teens will learn much about

- prayer and how to offer prayer in corporate gatherings as well as in personal and family settings.
- 3) Those who read well can be taught to read with expression the Bible lesson before the sermon.
 - 4) Where the church approves, teens can pass the offering plates. Where allowed the teens can help with the counting of the offering.
 - 5) Young people, who play a musical instrument well, can be asked to play in the worship service, either individually or as part of an ensemble of teenagers or as part of an adult group that practices and contributes in worship services regularly.
 - 6) A teen choral group/music ministry team could be formed and sing several times a year in worship services. Teenagers should be invited also to sing in the adult choir or praise team.
 - 7) A group of teens could prepare dramatic readings of Bible passages on which the sermon is based, as described above, for example using Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and other narrative texts.
 - 8) Teens who write poetry can be asked to read a poem that they have written, or that someone else has written, that applies to the sermon subject.
 - 9) Youths, who are interested in artwork, can be asked to make a banner for the sanctuary. It would be especially good to ask their parents to make this a family project with each member of the family participating. Teens may construct artistic expressions in other media as well, e.g., a sculpture of a Biblical event and a drawing or painting for the cover of the church's Sunday bulletin or the worship folder for a special service.
 - 10) Young people who have special interest in and skills with drawing and other types of art can help with the graphic designs involved with the projection technology needed in worship services.
 - 11) Ask teenagers to usher, a very important service in many ways, especially in providing a hospitable welcome and aide to visitors that helps them feel comfortable and "fit in."
 - 12) Teens can help clean and set up the sanctuary. Doing so helps them develop a sense of investment in and caring for the worship center.
 - 13) If a sound system is used, teenagers with an interest and ability in technical matters can operate the sound system and/or a projection system. In larger churches, where an especially high level of quality performance is expected, they can apprentice with adult technicians so the younger people can develop the necessary skills and be able to assist on a regular basis, eventually substituting when the adults need to be away, and to take over in due time themselves, being well-educated in the operation of these systems when they do.

- 14) A teenager who knows sign language could be asked to sign for any who are hard of hearing in the congregation.
- 15) Teenagers, together with their younger siblings and their parents, can serve as greeters prior to and after the worship service.
- 16) Teens can be given an opportunity to publicly express their faith.
 - a) Teens who want to make a confession of faith can do so.
 - b) Reciting a confession of faith, such as the Apostles' Creed, and a commitment to obey, directly engages teens in an edifying experience and an important witness to any visitors, especially other teenagers, who may not be Christians.
 - c) Those who've had an especially significant experience in their faith can be invited to share it with the congregation as part of their response to God's Word, or they can do so after the service, followed by a congregational expression of thanksgiving to God.
 - d) Teens who are maturing in Christ can be asked to present a sermon, where the church approves and with pastoral guidance.
- 17) A commissioning can be held in the worship service, as part of the congregation's responding to God's Word, for a teen or a group of teens leaving on a short-term mission trip. Ask the commissioned person or group to report to the congregation upon returning.
- 18) Where the church approves, older teens who are maturing in Christ, and with pastoral guidance, can be asked to present a sermon.
- 19) Ask at least two teenagers to serve on the Worship Planning Team in your church.
- 20) A representative sample of teenagers can serve on a Teen Advisory Council or a teenagers' Worship Focus Group to comment on worship services and make suggestions for engaging young people more fully in corporate worship. Teens (more than one) could also be asked to serve on the church's worship planning team.
- 21) Teenagers can carry flags of other countries into the sanctuary at the beginning of a worship service that has missions as its theme.
- 22) Teenagers, together with the rest of their family, can participate in lighting a candle in a large Advent wreath in the beginning of a worship service during the season of Advent. A child or teenager can light the candle for the day, another can explain the symbolism of that candle, another family member can read a passage from the Bible, and another can lead in prayer. A different family can do so for each of the other Sundays and at Christmas or Christmas Eve. The same can be done with a Lenten triad during the season of Lent; the triad is a triangular base, covered with purple cloth, which contains one candle for each week of Lent.

- 23) During warmer weather, especially in the summertime, hold an outdoor intergenerational worship service. Teens can serve in such services in many of the above ways, and as worshipers they feel the less formal milieu facilitates their engagement in the worship service. Serving over time in these above and other ways, helps the teenagers understand more about the church and how it functions and feel more part of and closely connected and bonded with the church, which also facilitates their connecting and bonding with the Lord, indeed with our Triune God.

Participating with Everyone Else

- 1) Singing
 - a) Sing at least one song in each service that the teenagers have learned at home, in their youth groups, or in their classes.
 - b) As much as possible include songs the young people like to sing.
 - c) Use songs where the lyrics are understandable and relate to everyone and to teens in particular.
- 2) Several means can be used to involve teenagers during periods of prayer that will help them feel they are praying:
 - a) Whoever offers prayers should include concerns of teens in the prayer (e.g., worries about well-being of parents and siblings, problems with friends, their health, what they will do for a living, school subjects).
 - b) Ask the teens to write their prayer needs on a card or mention them to the pastor prior to the congregational prayer.
 - c) Include bidding prayers (see above).
 - d) Use litanies (see above).
 - e) Saying “Please hear our prayer.” at specific points in the General Prayers. (See Lesson Five.)
 - f) Regularly recite memorized prayers (e.g., the Lord’s Prayer and the Kyrie Eleison).
- 3) Include the following in the sermon:
 - a) Provide some questions in the church bulletin under the title of the sermon that give the teens and others specific subjects to listen for that will be included in the sermon.
 - b) Insert an outline of the sermon in the bulletin or on a projection screen. A sentence outline helps the congregation most accurately understand the main

points of the sermon, not only during the worship service, but long after for those who save the insert together with any notes they've added.

- c) Use words teenagers can understand. When a sophisticated word or term has to be used, define and explain it, and give an illustration.
 - d) Use examples teens can relate to and include teenagers in illustrations as well as those younger and older.
 - e) Apply at least one point in the sermon to teenagers; specify for them what that point is and what it means for their lives. In this and in the preceding suggestions, the above recommended Teen Advisory Council or teenagers' Worship Focus Group can be helpful. Moreover, in your dialogue with them, they will be learning and having a heads-up that will alert them to that point when they hear it in the sermon. They'll also be able to use these experiences with you to teach their peers and others.
 - f) Use visual aids that are of excellent quality.
 - g) Pastors, especially in contemporary services, engage teens as well as children and adults by at least occasionally raising a question for the congregation to discuss with one or two others around them for about a minute. The pastor then asks for volunteers to share one point that came out of their discussion. The most effective questions contain words that young people can understand and subjects to which they can relate. Invite these younger worshipers also to respond, and be sure to call upon those who raise their hand.
- 4) Teens should be encouraged to give during the offering from what they have earned. The understanding of offering what they are giving to God and their involvement in doing so is enhanced if the congregation brings their gifts to the communion table or another designated place in the chancel.
 - 5) Use antiphonal readings for the Bible lesson, such as in Psalm 136 (see above).
 - 6) Reading Bible passages responsively (where the leader and the congregation take turns reading the verses) involves teens and all other ages together.
 - 7) Participating in the sacraments engages teens and employs all five senses.
 - a) Being baptized themselves, if they weren't as infants, facilitates a life changing relationship with God and marks them as members of his covenant people, the body of Christ.
 - b) Partaking of the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, the Eucharist, connects teens with Christ and fellow believers in a profound and life shaping experience.
 - 8) Greet teenagers as well as older people after the service. Warmly express delight that they were present in the worship of the Lord.

Engaging Adults in Corporate Worship

As Leaders and Special Contributors

- 1) Adults can be asked to lead in offering a prayer in the service.
- 2) Adults, who read well, can be taught to read with expression and to read the Bible lesson before the sermon.
- 3) Where denominational and local church policy permit, adults who are not necessarily office bearers can be involved in distributing the elements of Holy Communion.
- 4) Adults with musical and leadership skills can lead in the singing of psalms, hymns, and songs.
- 5) Adults who play a musical instrument well, can be asked to play in the worship service, either individually or as part of an ensemble that practices and contributes regularly.
- 6) Those who enjoy singing can join the choir or praise team and/or form a singing or other musical group, such as bell ringers.
- 7) Adults can offer dramatic readings, as described above.
- 8) Adults can usher, a very important service in many ways, especially in providing a hospitable welcome and aide to visitors that helps them feel comfortable and “fit in.”
- 9) They can be invited to help clean and set up the sanctuary. Doing so helps them feel an investment in and caring for the worship center and develop a sense of the holiness of God in this place dedicated to his worship.
- 10) Those with an interest and ability in technical matters can operate a sound system, a projection system, and/or a live-stream system where available. They can also help teenagers to apprentice with them so the younger people can develop the necessary skills and be able to assist on a regular basis, eventually substituting when the adults need to be away, and to take over in due time themselves. Many teens are more computer and Internet savvy than many adults and can be especially helpful in working with those in the church who have responsibilities with such digital technology.
- 11) Adults, who are interested in artwork, can be asked to make a banner for the sanctuary. It would be especially good to make this a family project with each member of the family participating. They may contribute art work in other media as well, e.g., a sculpture of a Biblical event and a drawing or painting for the cover of the church’s Sunday bulletin or the worship folder for a special service.
- 12) Adults who have special interest in and skills with drawing and other types of art can help with the graphic designs involved with the projection technology needed in worship services.

- 13) A commissioning could be held during the worship service for one or more adults leaving on a short-term mission trip.
- 14) Adults can serve on a Worship Team that, together with the Pastor and the Minister of Music, plans the corporate worship services for the church.
- 15) An adult can give a word of encouragement before the sermon, preparing hearers for the importance of listening well, or even more significantly after the sermon as part of the congregation's response to God's Word as encouragement to obey that teaching from the Bible. This encouragement will be especially effective if the adult doing so is a respected member of the congregation.

Participating with Everyone Else

- 1) Sing at least one of the best of the historic hymns in each service. Doing so helps adults experience the blessings of a good tradition and enables the worshipers of all ages to learn Biblical theology in an enjoyable manner.
- 2) Several means can be used to engage adults as well as all others during periods of prayer that will help them feel they are praying:
 - a) Regularly recite memorized prayers (e.g., the Lord's Prayer and the Kyrie Eleison).
 - b) Use litanies (see above).
 - c) Include bidding prayers (see above).
 - d) Saying "Please hear our prayer." at specific points in the General Prayers. (See Lesson Five.)
 - e) Ask the adults to write their prayer needs on a card (can be anonymous) and hand the card to an usher, or mention them to the pastor, prior to the General Prayers.
 - f) When prayers are printed in the bulletin or another source, make them be easy to read, e.g., easy words, short sentences, and, if possible, larger print type (which will also help children and older adults).
- 3) Include the following in the sermon:
 - a) Provide some questions in the church bulletin under the title of the sermon that give the congregation specific subjects to listen for that will be included in the sermon.
 - b) Insert an outline of the sermon in the bulletin or on a projection screen. A sentence outline helps the congregation most accurately understand the main points of the sermon, not only during the worship service, but long after for those who save the insert together with any notes they've added.

- c) For the most part offer sermons that are focused on and explain a passage of the Bible. Expository sermons, that help people connect with, understand, and apply God’s Word in their lives, provide what they most long for and need to know.
- d) Use words children can understand without definition; in that way all adults will comprehend easily what you are saying. When a sophisticated word or term has to be used, define and explain it, and give an illustration.
- e) Use examples people can relate to for each point in the sermon. Tell at least a couple of relevant stories, but regarding the stories be careful of the following:
 - 1- Don’t tell too many stories.
 - 2- Keep the stories as short, succinct, and to-the-point as possible.
 - 3- Make sure the people can clearly understand how the main point of each story helps them understand a passage in God’s Word and how it relates to the point to which it applies in the sermon.
- f) Apply at least one point in the sermon to the needs of most adults in the congregation; specify for them what that point is and what it means for their lives.
- g) Some pastors, especially in contemporary services, engage adults as well as younger people by occasionally raising a question of application for the congregation to think about and/or discuss with one or two others around them for about a minute. A question such as, “How do you see this teaching in God’s Word applying in your life today?” After about 30 to 45 seconds (watch the clock carefully!), the pastor then asks for volunteers to share one point that came out of their discussion. The most effective questions contain words and subject matters all present can understand, to which they can relate, and that involve application of God’s Word, never its interpretation, which preferably should be done by a trained pastor, who has studied the original languages of the Bible (the Hebrew in which the Old Testament was written and the Greek of the New Testament) or at least had an education in Biblical studies, during the sermon.

Such an application question can be useful, when people hear their peers make applications in their daily lives. If this method is used, it should be done rarely, only once during a sermon with a carefully prepared question, and with strong leadership monitoring and limiting the responses from the congregation, so that no speeches are given by the congregants and that the feedback only lasts for a minute or two; the people have come to worship longing to hear God’s Word spoken, including interpreted and applied by a trained pastor. I have seen this method seriously abused, resulting in up to half of the sermon taken up by people who like to express their views, and the pastor has been either too weak to stop the discussion and return to the rest of the sermon, or else he has become too caught up in the discussion that he lost track of the time, both of which does a disservice to the congregation who are there with a great need to hear God’s Word explained and applied to their lives.

- 4) Adults should be encouraged to give during the offering, which when done in the Responding to God's Word section of the service, especially preceded by a transitional statement from the pastor or other worship leader, helps the giver have significant and increasing pleasure doing so. Adults, together with the rest of the congregation, can give their offering in a basket sent down the pews or bring their offering to baskets or plates on the communion table or elsewhere in the chancel.
 - 5) Give the whole congregation, adults included, the opportunity to participate by using antiphonal and responsive readings for the Bible lesson.
 - 6) Participating in the sacraments involves adults and employs all five senses.
 - 7) Adults can serve as greeters prior to and following the worship service; those who are parents, can do so together with their children of all ages. Greeting in this manner sends a subtle but strong message that everyone else in these age ranges is warmly welcome in the worship service.
 - 8) Reciting a confession of faith, such as the Apostles' Creed, or preferably the Nicene Creed, and a commitment to obey the Lord's commands, directly engages adults in an edifying experience and an important witness to any visitors who may not be Christians.
 - a) Adults who want to make a confession of faith do so when joining the church, and they can do so as well on other occasions as a testimony to God's current work in their lives, enabling others to sense how God is active in his people's minds, hearts, and daily experiences.
 - b) Those who have had an especially significant experience in their faith can be allowed to share it with the congregation as part of their responding to God's Word or after the service followed by a congregational expression of thanksgiving to God.
 - 9) During warmer weather, especially in the summertime, hold an outdoor intergenerational worship service. Adults can serve in such services in many of the above ways, and as worshipers they feel the less formal milieu facilitates their engagement in the worship service.
- c. After you've constructed the long list produced by this group activity, be sure to emphasize that they don't have to do all these things at once, or even every one of them. Tell them to not be overwhelmed; do just one, two, or as many as they can at a time and the rest as they have resources for doing in the future. Mention that they should involve others also to help implement the ideas they select, so they don't have to do all the work themselves.
 - d. **Be sure to point out that the worship service does not have to be, nor should it be, made into a fun activity or made simplistic in an attempt to accommodate it to children, youth, and others in the surrounding community. The dictionary definition of fun denotes amusement, gaiety, the arousing of laughter, or merely a**

lack of serious or ulterior purpose, which mitigate accomplishment of our objectives in God’s worship. This is why we don’t see the word fun used anywhere in the Bible in the context of worship. Joy, YES, but fun, no.

The younger ones can understand much, and they will grow in their understanding as they worship regularly over the years with their parents and other adults in God’s covenant community. As the Holy Spirit works in the hearts and minds of believers in worship, the resulting sanctification process will produce much joy that far transcends and outlasts temporary and superficial “fun” that fades and fails to fulfill their longing for meeting with, walking with, and growing in a life-long, indeed, eternal relationship with God.

This reality doesn’t mean fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ can’t or shouldn’t include experiences that are fun. Countless and continuous other occasions exist where such enjoyment regularly occurs in a multitude of other fellowship and service opportunities in the life and work of the church.

- e. Sometimes small children need to be taken out of the sanctuary for a temporary period of time that day by one of their parents. Discuss what can be done to help the parents in such circumstances. In addition to the suggestions that come from this discussion, add any of the following that are not mentioned by the group:
 - 1) Designate a “cry room” (but give it a more accurate and positive term, such as parent-child care room), preferably near the sanctuary, where the parent can still see and hear, or at least hear, and be connected with the worship service.
 - 2) Put in the bulletin or worship folder a weekly announcement warmly welcoming the parents to move about as needed (going and returning) when their little ones need special attention. Assure them that this period in their lives will not last long, at least in retrospect! Most children can sit through an hour long service by the time they are four years old; some can do so earlier, though others will need longer.
 - 3) While some children cause a challenge for their parents in their early years, regularly encourage the parents to persevere. Advise them to not make the mistake of many parents who don’t involve their children in worship from the beginning, thinking they’ll wait until the youngsters are older. I’ve talked with many parents who did that and they’ve shed a lot of tears as they unsuccessfully try to get their teenagers to attend worship.

In the psychology of human development, children for about the first 10 to 11 years of age are receptive to external motivation; i.e., typically they will do what an authority figure (e.g., parent, teacher, pastor) tells them to do. After that age their motivation is largely internal, and they will frequently resist being told what to do by an external source, especially when it involves something they don’t want to do. Thus, the period following age 10 or 11 is not an optimum time in their lives to begin urging them to attend worship.

It is much better, and Biblical, to involve them in worship on at least a weekly basis, from the very beginning of their existence,⁵ and when they become teenagers and adults they are more likely to look at worship as a normal part of their lives, as part of their “at-home experience,” and they miss it when they are not there at that time of the week. Remember Proverbs 22:6, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” Keep in mind also the informative and comforting realities in the Biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, believers in Christ, such as, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6) For more on this doctrine, see the PowerPoint presentation, “[Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God’s Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity](#),” which is on the Christian Theology page of my Website. Using the Search bar, type in the word perseverance.

Responding by Speaking the Truth in Love to Parental and Other Objections to Intergenerational Corporate Worship

4. As with most innovations, objections will arise to your plan to include all ages in your church’s corporate worship.
 - a. Ask the group, as a whole, what objections they anticipate. List them on the projection screen as they are mentioned. Include any of the following that are not mentioned:
 - 1) From children: “I don’t want to go to big people’s church! They use too many big words, and it’s boring.”
 - 2) From parents: “I’m with the kids every day, all week long. I need a break, and I can’t worship God with my mind being distracted by what the kids are doing.”
 - 3) From older people in the congregation: “The kids are too distracting.”
 - b. Ask the class or seminar participants to return to their small groups. Ask them to select one of these questions to focus on, and list answers that will provide a loving, sensitive, and caring but helpful resolution of their concerns.
 - 1) Make sure that all three questions are addressed, i.e., that at least one small group is focusing on each question. If you don’t have enough people to have at least three or four in three small groups, ask two groups to discuss two of the questions (one each) and deal with the third question as a large group. Give the group 15 minutes to do their work.
 - 2) Ask the groups to reconvene in the large group and as the recorders report as previously (except all the groups focusing on the first question reporting first, then all

⁵ Evidence exists that even in the womb, after a baby has developed hearing, he or she recognizes certain sounds, especially his or her mother’s voice that become familiar and give lasting comfort.

- the groups reporting on the second question, then all the groups addressing the third question).
- a) Take one question at a time.
 - b) List the responses as the recorders report their group's work.
 - c) After each group reports on its question, ask the whole group if they have any other ideas that have not been mentioned.
 - d) Add any new ideas to the list of ways to engage the age group being focused on in the discussion to those mentioned above in this lesson.
- c. Next ask the group, "While we were constructing this list of what can be done in our worship services to engage all ages in God's worship, is there anything else anyone has thought of that we could add to the list?"

Intergenerational Worship in Malawi

5. Throughout the Bible the people of God's covenant, children, teenagers, and adults, have worshiped together. The churches in countries where the cultural ethos has not been shaped by the industrial age with its organization by specialization and production have held closer to Biblical patterns of worship. The African church exhibits an excellent example. Rather than separating out the children to worship by themselves, they are included in many ways.

While on a teaching assignment in Lilongwe, Malawi, I attended the morning worship service in the Chikuluti CCAP that lasted about two hours and 45 minutes. After the high school Sunday school class, which was held in the front of the sanctuary prior to the beginning of the worship service, cane mats were brought in and laid on the concrete floor between the first pews and the slightly raised chancel. Minutes later families began arriving for the service. The littlest children selected where they wanted to sit on the mats, and older children, teens, young adults, and older adults sat on pews.

The sanctuary's pews had one aisle between them. The women's choir sat in the first five rows on the right side facing the chancel with a young women's choir behind them, and a young adult male choir sat on the left side. Behind the male choir was a children's choir led by a young person. Only the older women's choir was robed, but all choral groups were very appropriately dressed. At various times throughout the worship service the several choral groups, including youth, stood where they were and sang to the accompaniment of two electronic keyboards that were played by two young adult males.

The children on the mats sat quietly for most of the almost three hours of worship. When the congregation stood, e.g., to sing, dance, and bring their offering to the chancel, the children also stood up and participated. The children were also permitted to move around as they had need and even walk outside the building through the

doors on either side of the sanctuary where they were sitting. They promptly and unobtrusively returned to their places on the mats. On the very few occasions mostly after a couple of hours, where some of the smallest children had to receive a corrective reminder, it was gently and tenderly done either by one of the women choir members directly in front of the children, one of the elders sitting close behind them in the chancel, or an older peer sitting with them. The children were very well behaved and exhibited no sign of discontent or disruption even during the 45 minute sermon! Moreover, their presence not only reminded us of God’s covenant with all his children, and the pleasure they give to God and the rest of us in worship, but of what they were able to learn by being with us as they further developed the sense of being at home in the corporate worship of the church.

Christians throughout the centuries, and all over the world, profess, as we recite the historic Nicene Creed, to believing in the “one holy catholic and apostolic church.” The word, catholic, means universal, which denotes the global constituency of the church, the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:27; Genesis 12:3; Revelation 4:9) Thus, it is especially enjoyable to worship with the church in other countries. Other believers have much to share with us that will enrich our worship. You can sense this joy by viewing this abbreviated synopsis of the Chikuluti CCAP worship service at <https://youtu.be/nMAHqs5SB5Q>. See more in the *Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology* PowerPoint on the Christian Theology page of my Website at www.fromacorntoak12.com.

➤ DISCUSS:

- a. Show this video clip of the morning worship service in the Chikuluti CCAP in Lilongwe, Malawi. Focus on the many ways children were included and engaged; list them.
 - b. Which of the ways children participated in the Chikuluti worship service could be incorporated in our church’s worship services?
 - c. This worship service is an excellent example of church worship based on the teaching of God’s Word, the Bible, about what he specifies should be included in his worship. Notice and discuss the following texts and related passages cited in this manual:
 - 1) Hospitality (Romans 12:9-21; Hebrews 13)
 - 2) Singing (Colossians 3:16)
 - 3) Intergenerational Worship (Acts 20:7-12)
 - 4) Stewardship (2 Corinthians 9:3)
6. For any of the cognitive objectives you have not as yet observed the stated behavior, distribute file cards as needed, and ask the students to give you the stipulated responses. Be sure to ask them to sign their name on each card. Or, you can verbally ask the class, corporately in session or selected representative individuals, and/or those about whom you have a special concern, in or outside the class (especially outside and individually for those about whom you are concerned in order to avoid embarrassment and to facilitate their responses), to do the behaviors specified in the objectives. Review the instruction as needed,

for any objectives that are not accomplished as you intend them to be. Doing so in class, will help those who need the remedial help and be a good memory refresher and reinforcer for those who have accomplished the objectives.

Action Plan Steps for Lesson Seven

7. For the remaining time in this session, continue to construct your Action Plans. First individually, then in your groups of four, reflect on these questions. Write them on the flipchart, chalkboard, overhead, or other projection device you use. Add any other questions that may be helpful.
 - a. What changes should I implement in the church(es) I'm serving...
 - 1) To engage children in corporate worship?
 - 2) To engage teenagers in corporate worship?
 - 3) To engage adults in corporate worship?
 - b. Which changes should I implement first?
8. When considering how to engage children in Christian corporate public worship, reflect on how the church in Africa has done so very effectively.
9. Whenever we make changes, including and especially in worship services, some and often many people become upset. In our next lesson we'll examine Biblical principles for avoiding and overcoming conflict when making changes, especially in application to worship planning.
10. Closing prayer asking God's help to apply what has been learned in this lesson as he would have us do in the church(es) we are serving.

Biblical Principles for Managing Tensions and Differences

Needs of the Learners:

1. Felt Needs:
 - a. See Lesson One section on felt needs.
 - b. Include here the needs the students identified in Lesson One that are applicable to the subjects in this lesson.
 - c. If not included in b., add how can we avoid, manage, and resolve conflict most successfully?
2. Unfelt Needs:

All the students need to learn the Biblical teaching on, and how, to develop and implement the following competencies:

 - a. What causes conflict in the church.
 - b. How to avoid unnecessary conflict.
 - c. How to manage and resolve conflict that does occur.

Goal: This lesson will help the church leaders and their congregations to understand, prevent, manage, and resolve conflict situations. At the conclusion of this session the participants will add to their specific Action Plan ways to implement these teachings of the Bible in their own churches.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson each participant will be able to do the following:

1. Identify and explain, verbally or on a 3 x 5 card, at least three principles for avoiding conflict and at least three principles for managing conflict when it does arise, and cite at least one Biblical text for each of these principles for avoiding and managing conflict in the church.
2. For each of the three principles for avoiding and managing conflict, cite verbally or in writing at least one example for each pertaining to worship planning in the church, and explain at least one way how each principle will help avoid or manage and eventually resolve that conflict.
3. During this lesson, the teacher will observe only positive affective nonverbal feedback (e.g., enthusiasm, excitement, and joy) and hear no complaints when identifying and explaining the meaning, significance, importance, and Biblical basis for avoiding, managing, and resolving conflicts in worship planning.
4. By the end of the course, at least 75% of the class members will demonstrate their affective interest by asking at least one question or making at least one positive comment in class, or with the teacher at break times, either verbally or in writing.
5. By the end of this course, at least 75% of the class will report to the teacher, verbally or in writing,
 - a. that they feel more confident and encouraged in explaining to others the Biblical basis for preventing, managing, and resolving conflict involving worship in the church,
 - b. that they understand the objections of others to changes in worship and that they can confidently, caringly, and effectively respond to those objections for God's sake including for peace in the church,

- c. and that they feel more motivated and able to implement the needed methods for avoiding and managing conflict pertaining to worship planning and worship practices in their congregations.
6. By the next lesson, at least half of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via email, by regular mail, or on a 3 x 5 card) that they have talked with least one other person in the church(es) they serve about least one modification they want to make in the church's(es') corporate worship planning in order to avoid or manage conflict.
7. Within three months of the end of this course, at least 75% of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via text, via email or by regular mail) that they have implemented in their congregation's worship services at least three aspects of conflict prevention and management that they learned in this course.
8. Add to the Action Plan for the church(es) he or she is serving at least one idea from this lesson that he or she wants to implement and at least one SMART step to do so.
9. Within three months of the end of this course, all the students will have begun to implement at least three elements of their Action Plan pertaining to this lesson within the congregation(s) they serve.

Materials Needed

1. The first three materials listed in Lesson One.
2. At least one 3 x 5 file card for each participant. These are always helpful for many purposes.

Introduction

1. Ask the question, "When changes are introduced in a worship service, what often occurs?" When the response of conflict is mentioned, explain that whenever we make changes, including and particularly in worship services, some and often many people become upset.
 - Since we live in a world where sin still exists, it is normal for conflict to occur, even in the church, the body of Christ, where people function at different levels of sanctification. (Ask who can review briefly what we discussed about sanctification in Lesson Four. For further information on sanctification, see [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology](#).) Therefore, until the Lord returns, conflict will occur, but some, even many, conflicts can be avoided, and those that do arise can be managed and resolved. This is an important, advantageous, and very practical perspective to maintain in order to enable people to avoid disillusionment, discouragement, and defeat. Again, we see how God's Word and will is most realistic and helpful.
2. In this lesson, we'll examine Biblical principles for avoiding and overcoming conflict when making changes, especially in application to worship planning. These principles can be summarized under the headings of three Ls. Put these on the flipchart: **L**ove the people, **L**isten to the people, and **L**ive with the people.
3. While conflict is to be expected, many conflicts can be avoided by how we speak and act. In each of these three **L** approaches to managing tensions and differences, we'll first look at principles for avoiding conflict, that is, Biblical guidelines for what we can do and refrain from doing to prevent much conflict from even arising. Then we'll look at principles for

managing conflict that does arise. Unless otherwise noted, the Biblical passages we'll be studying will help us in both individual and group settings.

4. In the sections which follow, write the Bible text references on the flipchart, ask different people to read them, and then identify and discuss the teaching in each passage regarding how loving, or learning, or living with the people helps manage tensions and differences. Include the information in the parentheses if it is not mentioned in the discussion of the texts.

Love the People

1. Read a brief Bible passage related to today's lesson and offer prayer. Explain that the Lord has commanded us to love all people. After each of the following passages is read, ask the group to identify who it is we are to love.

a. Avoiding Conflict

- 1) Matthew 22:40 and Luke 10:25-37 (Love your neighbor, all people, including your enemies.)
- 2) Matthew 5:43-48 (Love your neighbor, including your enemies and others who oppose you.)
- 3) John 13:34-35 (Love fellow believers.)
- 4) 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (Love the church [note the context 1 Corinthians 12-14]. This passage is a definition of the Greek word for love, *agape*, which is the word used in the above passages.)
- 5) Proverbs 3:5-6 (Pray to God for direction and trust him.)
 - Discuss: If a church leader wants to introduce new songs, other music, and musical instruments in his or her church's worship services and baptize with given African names, what will he or she do according to 1 Corinthians 13:4-7? What will this leader not do? How will other passages above help? Will such practices help pave the way for these changes, if not now, then in the future?

b. Managing Conflict

- 1) John 17:6-25; Ephesians 6:18; James 5:16 (Pray for the church, the opposing sides, and in particular for those who oppose you.)
- 2) Matthew 5:23-24 (Take the first step; don't wait for the other person[s] to come to you.)
- 3) Ephesians 4:15 (Speak the truth but do so in love [see 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 for how].)
- 4) Ephesians 4:25-27, 29-32 (Don't speak falsely but truly; in anger don't sin; don't use unwholesome language; speak to edify the people; don't grieve the Holy Spirit;

eliminate all bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and every form of malice; be kind, compassionate, forgiving.)

- 5) Proverbs 10:12 (Don't allow hatred to motivate your acts.)
- 6) Proverbs 24:28-29; Romans 12:17-21 (Don't be deceptive and don't take revenge.)
- 7) 2 Corinthians 12:20 (Refrain from speaking negatively about your opponent[s] in private conversations with other people; what you say will usually be told to others and eventually to the opponent[s], and frequently not as you have said it; thus, avoid gossip, jealousy, quarrelling, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, arrogance, and disorder.)
- 8) Proverbs 15:1, 4, 18, 23, 31-32 (Speak softly and gently, not with harsh words. Be patient in confronting an angry person, and do not respond in kind. Group setting: Refrain from speaking harshly to or about your opponent[s] by name in a public gathering; the sympathies of the crowd often go toward those they perceive as being treated unfairly in front of others.)
- 9) Proverbs 16:21, 23-24; 17:27 (Pleasant speech persuades.)
- 10) Proverbs 29:11 (Don't give vent to your anger; maintain self-control [cf. Galatians 5:23]. Anger does not motivate. Self-control communicates assurance and confidence.)
- 11) James 4:1-3 (Pray but with the right motives; cf. 5:16 and Matthew 5:44-45.)
- 12) Matthew 18:15 (First talk one-to-one with someone who opposes you. [This text addresses a situation where one has sinned against you, but the principle applies to all conflict situations.]
 - **DISCUSS:** At some point in the months ahead, the above church leader decided to make the changes in the worship service. Some people still became upset. In the light of these passages, how should the leader proceed to manage the conflict and bring a just peace to the church?

Listen to the People

2. Listening before speaking is a valuable Biblical principle. In these days, careful listening, what in the literature is often called “active listening,” is a skill not characteristic of many people and typically not done well or for very long, especially by people in the Western Hemisphere. A study by Microsoft shows that the average attention span of human beings is only eight seconds!* A significant part of that situation, are the theological realities of

* Cision Connect, Communications Best Practices, January 22, 2018. <https://www.cision.com/2018/01/declining-attention-killing-content-marketing-strategy/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20study%20by%20Microsoft%2C%20the%20average,decreases%20by%20a%20whopping%2088%20percent%20every%20year.> (Accessed 7/27/2021)

whether a person is regenerated (born again), the function of sin in one’s life, and whether and how far along in the sanctification process a person has developed.

One reason that the section on love precedes the listening section, is that a genuine love for people motivates and facilitates listening to what they want us to know and to tell us, and doing so demonstrates that love. Intently listening to them enables them to sense we care for them and truly want to hear what is on their heart and mind. Sensing that we care, enables them, especially with the Holy Spirit’s help, to be more inclined to receive what we want them to know and do, but first we have to “earn the right to be heard,” as some insightfully observe.

Listening intently will help greatly to manage tensions and differences, avoiding much conflict and managing that which does arise. Such listening involves including and omitting certain actions. **TAKE A MOMENT TO THINK:** When you are talking with someone, what do you want them to do? Do you think that they want the same of us?

- **DISCUSS:** What should we be sure to include in our conversations with people, and what should we make sure we omit and never do in our conversations?

Depending on the size of the group, and the amount of time remaining, hold this discussion in the whole group, or in small groups with reporting back to the whole group, as in the preceding lessons. As the class responds, or as small group recorders report, write their responses in on a chart such as the one that follows. Add any of the following that are not mentioned by the group.

Include in Careful Listening	Omit in order to Listen Carefully
1. Eye contact	1. Looking at your watch.
2. Occasionally repeating what the other person has said in your own words.	2. Looking at anything else, e.g., your digital device.
3. When you do speak, speak warmly.	3. Interrupting
4. When the other person has finished talking, say what you heard him or her say in your own words, and then ask if he or she agrees that you understand.	4. Changing the subject
5. Explain what you want to say and why.	5. Talking too much about yourself
6. Ask the other person to tell you what he or she heard you say (so you can clarify or correct any misunderstanding).	6. Belittling, mocking, or making fun of what the other person has said or any of his or her characteristics

In phone or Internet conversations, use the same procedures as applicable. Whenever possible, have especially important phone or cyber conversations with the video features that are now available.

a. Avoiding Conflict

- 1) Ecclesiastes 5:1-2; Proverbs 1:5 (Begin with listening to God.)

- 2) James 1:19-20 (While the primary reference is to listening to God through his Word, it also involves listening to how he speaks through other believers. The Holy Spirit speaks through others in the body of Christ; we need to listen to them, even when we don't like what they are saying.)
- 3) Deuteronomy 13:6-8 (Be careful, discerning, about who you listen to; not all opinions are of equal value.)
- 4) 1 Kings 12:1-17 (When people sense their leader doesn't listen to them, they lose respect for the leader, and the leader can lose the people.)
- 5) Philippians 2:3-4 (Let the interests of others motivate what you do, not your own ambition; humbly, carefully, and sincerely consider the viewpoints of others. However, after having done so you don't have to accept all viewpoints.)

b. Managing Conflict

- 1) Proverbs 12:15; 19:20 (Seek the advice of those who are wise.)
 - 2) Proverbs 15:31-32; Ecclesiastes 7:5 (Listen to those who are wise, even when they offer rebuke.)
 - 3) Proverbs 15:28; 18:13 (Listen before speaking. A good test of our listening, and to help others listen, is to model and ask the others to also practice this listening skill, which churches have used effectively: "Before we speak, let's agree to restate the other person's position in our own words in such a way that he or she agrees we understand what he or she is trying to say. When the other person agrees that we've stated his or her position correctly, then we can offer our response.")
 - 4) Proverbs 15:23 (Don't confront in anger; rather patiently await the right time to approach the other person[s] when the anger of the moment has been replaced by rational reflection. Cf. 14:17)
 - Discuss: In the light of our study of the Bible texts, what other steps can a church leader take to manage conflict that has arisen in the church? Add any of the following not mentioned in the discussion of this question.
- a) First be sure of the facts. (For example, many churches want to include music the young people like to listen to, so they change the music in the worship services to what they think will attract the youth...without asking a representative sample of those they are trying to reach. However, a large number of the young people, often more than half, like such music for their regular listening each day, in their youth groups, on special occasions, and in other churches they visit, but not for the regular worship services in their own church. Before adults make changes on the basis of what they think the youth want, be sure they ask either all, or a truly representative number, of the young people what they would like in their church's worship services.)

- b) Carefully select a group of reasonable people, who represent the opposing factions, to meet together over time. Give the group a name, e.g., Worship Planning Task Force. Begin meetings with a period of time for studying the Bible (e.g., 1 Corinthians) and caring for personal matters of concern to the members. Take at least 20 minutes in groups of four for the people to come to know one another better; include the opportunity to share any individual concerns for which the group could pray. Ask the small groups to pray for those needs. Take time for this Bible study and prayer at the beginning of each meeting. As people come to know one another better, a sense of community, bonding, and caring in and through the Holy Spirit occurs, and the basis for harmonious decision-making is established with many other benefits for the life and work of the church as well.
- c) In confronting someone in a conflict situation, begin with positive words of appreciation for what that person has done for the church, others you know, and/or yourself. (A type of gift, cf. Proverbs 18:16a and 21:14a) Doing so reduces the need for the other person to defend him or herself and gives him or her more of a sense of security that you come as a friend rather than as a foe; he or she is more able to listen to what you have to say. Before you speak ask the person to explain the situation from his or her point of view. Listen carefully. Then repeat what you heard in your own words and ask if you've understood correctly before explaining what you have to say.

Live with the People

- 3. The longer we live with people and serve them, the more they trust us; that trust is the basis of a relationship and necessary for our being able to introduce changes in worship and in other aspects of the life and work of the church without causing disharmony and even division. Trust develops over time and is based on a track record of authenticity, keeping promises, and love. We can do more each year we stay, including nurturing the people, reinforcing and, if necessary, modifying the changes, and continuing to communicate, which is why church leaders who serve in one place for many years usually accomplish more and are more effective than if they stayed only a short while. Of course, the work of the Holy Spirit is the reason for the sanctification of the church and the main reason for changes succeeding, but he functions through the leaders of the church and the people in the process.
 - a. Avoiding Conflict
 - 1) Luke 10:1-7 (Though Jesus stated another reason for this command [verse 7], staying with one household had other benefits for the Kingdom of God. Living with the people you are trying to reach and serve will enable you to develop relationships with them which promotes the development of trust and communication.)
 - 2) Acts 20:31 (Paul lived with the church at Ephesus for three years, and that was a church planting situation!)
 - 3) 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 2:7 (Live righteously in God's sight and in the sight of his people; be above reproach; model Christlikeness.)

- 4) Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 (Leaders must commit themselves to not divide the church. If it ever appears there will be a church split, back off. Wait upon the Lord for a better time.)

b. Managing Conflict

- 1) Proverbs 16:7 (Make pleasing God your main objective and even enemies will be at peace with you. Over time you can outlast much opposition and win over many who initially oppose you.)
 - 2) 1 Timothy 1:3-7 (Living with and loving the people provides the most effective basis for addressing false teaching [and other issues mentioned in the letter].)
 - 3) Genesis 41 (While Joseph's tenure in Egypt was due to the leading of the Lord in a particular way to accomplish a special purpose in God's plan of redemption, the fact he stayed enabled him to gain the increasing trust of Pharaoh and the knowledge [e.g., of how much grain to give out to the other countries during the famine and still have enough for his own people] that he needed to be effective in his administration.)
 - 4) 2 Timothy 2:14-16; Titus 3:9-11 (Live according to God's word, avoid needless controversies, and warn others to not quarrel and not become divisive. Overlook some offenses. Don't break the relationship.)
 - 5) Colossians 3:12-17 (Live with each other characterized by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with each other, forgiving others as the Lord has forgiven you and all in the context of the love which binds these characteristics together in perfect unity; let the peace of Christ control yourself; be thankful; teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude to God.)
 - Discuss: A church leader has introduced new music in the church and the congregation has many people who are upset about it. Two main groups have formed in opposition. In the light of the above Bible passages we've been studying, what should the leader do?
4. For any of the cognitive objectives you have not as yet observed the stated behavior, distribute file cards as needed, and ask the students to give you the stipulated responses. Be sure to ask them to sign their name on each card. Or, you can verbally ask the class, corporately in session or selected representative individuals, and/or those about whom you have a special concern, in or outside the class (especially outside and individually for those about whom you are concerned in order to avoid embarrassment and to facilitate their responses), to do the behaviors specified in the objectives. Review the instruction as needed, for any objectives that are not accomplished as you intend them to be. Doing so in class, will help those who need the remedial help and be a good memory refresher and reinforcer for those who have accomplished the objectives.

Action Plan Steps for Lesson Eight

5. Say to the group, “For the remaining time in this session, continue to construct your Action Plans. First individually, then in your groups of four, reflect on these questions.” Write them on the flipchart. Add any other questions that may be helpful.
 - a. Who should I act more loving toward starting right away? (List the names.)
 - b. In what circumstances should I concentrate on listening more carefully? To which people in particular? What can I do, specifically, to accomplish more careful listening?
 - c. Are there any steps I should take such as establishing and working with a Worship Planning Task Force?
 - d. What can I do to increase the level of trust the people have in me?
 - e. How long do I plan to stay in this church? What will it take to increase my tenure here?
 - f. Who should talk with the bishop about longer tenure for pastors?

In addition to the material above, refer also to Lesson Nine in the Pastoral Care manual for further help in resolving conflicts.

6. Whenever we make changes, including and especially in worship services, we introduce something new to people. Since what is new often upsets many people and results in conflict, in our next lesson we’ll examine Biblical principles and other useful steps to help people accept, implement, and maintain something new, especially in application to worship planning. The principles in the next lesson will also help avoid conflict from arising; they help head off much unnecessary controversy and discord before such even occurs.
7. Close in prayer asking God’s help to apply what has been learned in this lesson as he would have us do in the church(es) we are serving.

Helpful Steps for Trying Something New

Needs of the Learners:

1. Felt Needs:
 - a. See Lesson One section on felt needs.
 - b. Include here the needs the students identified in Lesson One that are applicable to the subjects in this lesson.
 - c. If not included in b., add how can we have our new ideas accepted and implemented successfully?
2. Unfelt Needs:

All the students need to learn the Biblical teaching on, and how to develop and implement, the following competencies:

 - a. How to introduce something new in ways that will make it acceptable and maintain a just peace, harmony, and order in the church.
 - b. How to implement the new idea and other changes in a way that will head off much unnecessary controversy and discord before, during, and after the innovation is begun.

Goal: This lesson will help the church leaders and their congregations to learn essential aspects of implementing innovations in the church in such a way as to minimize conflict and facilitate their acceptance. At the conclusion of this session the participants will add to their specific Action Plan ways to implement these teachings of the Bible in their own churches.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson each participant will be able to do the following:

1. Identify and explain, verbally or on a 3 x 5 card, at least five steps for successfully implementing something new that he or she wants to do to improve the corporate worship at the church(es) he or she is serving and at least one Biblical text for each as applicable.
2. Identify, verbally or in writing, each of the four positive characteristics of an innovation and the one negative characteristic of something new; explain at least one way he or she will use each of these characteristics in implementing an innovation he or she wants to make (or how he or she would make one) in his or her congregation's corporate worship; and for each of these five characteristics, explain at least one reason why it is necessary to include that characteristic of an innovation to help a church congregation receive and support this change in its worship services.
3. Identify and explain, verbally or in writing, at least two reasons why it is imperative to enlist the help of opinion leaders, and the names of at least three opinion leaders in his or her congregation he or she will ask, to help him or her implement an innovation in his or her congregation(s).
4. During this lesson, the teacher will observe only positive affective nonverbal feedback (e.g., interest, enthusiasm, excitement, and joy) and hear no complaints when identifying and explaining the meaning, significance, importance, and Biblical basis for including all the steps for implementing innovations in worship.
5. By the end of the course, at least 75% of the class members will demonstrate their affective interest by asking at least one question or making at least one positive comment in class, or with the teacher at break times, either verbally or in writing.

6. By the end of this course, at least 75% of the class will report to the teacher, verbally or in writing,
 - a. that they feel more confident and encouraged in explaining to others the Biblical basis for implementing changes involving worship in the church,
 - b. that they understand the objections of others to changes in worship; that they can confidently, caringly, and effectively respond to those objections; and that they can implement improvements for God's worship while maintaining peace in the church,
 - c. and that they feel more motivated and able to implement needed changes pertaining to worship planning and worship practices in their congregations.
7. By the next lesson, at least half of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via email, by regular mail, or on a 3 x 5 card) that they have talked with least one opinion leader in the church(es) they serve about least one modification they want to make in the church's(es') corporate worship planning and at least three steps they intend to take in order to do so successfully, including how these steps will avoid or manage conflict.
8. Within three months of the end of this course, at least 75% of the attendees will report to the teacher (in person, by phone, via text, via email or by regular mail) that they have taken at least three steps toward implementing a needed change in their congregation's worship services that they learned in this course.
9. Add to the Action Plan for the church(es) he or she is serving, at least one idea from this lesson that he or she wants to implement and at least one SMART step to do so.
10. Within three months of the end of this course, all the students will have begun to implement at least three elements of their Action Plan pertaining to this lesson within the congregation(s) they serve.

Materials Needed

1. The first three materials listed in Lesson One.
2. At least one 3 x 5 file card for each participant. These are always helpful for many purposes.

Introduction

1. Review: What did we learn from our previous lesson? Discuss and list responses on the flipchart.
2. Ask for brief (two minutes or less) reports on the Action Plans developed at the end of the last lesson. List them on the flipchart as they are given. Discuss the most promising.
3. Ask the question, "When church leaders make changes in a worship service, what often results?" Many responses may be given; when you hear a reply that involves conflict, disharmony, discord, stop and say that the subject before us in this lesson is how to introduce something new in ways that will make it acceptable and maintain a just peace, harmony, and order in the church.
 - a. **The principles in this lesson are also ways to help avoid conflict from arising in addition to those we discussed in our last lesson. They help head off much unnecessary controversy and discord before such even occurs.**

- b. **The steps in this lesson will be applied to trying new things in worship. However, these procedures are also valuable for implementing changes in all aspects of the church's life and work.**
- c. **In this special lesson, we'll draw on the Bible, wisdom gained from the experience of many pastors, and the study of human nature and how changes most effectively occur in cultures throughout the world. Wherever a Bible text occurs, ask someone who reads well to read the passage; then as a whole group discuss its application to worship planning.**

How to Present Your Idea to Obtain the Congregation's Approval

1. Read a brief Bible passage related to today's lesson and offer prayer. Before presenting something new to the church, it is important to pray for God's guidance, remembering it is his church, and answer the following questions. (Consider asking your spouse or a trusted friend how he or she would answer these questions about you, assuring him or her that you sincerely want his or her true observations.)
 - a. A question of motivation: "Whose needs will this new thing primarily meet?" ("Am I doing this most of all for myself and the approval I'll receive from certain people, or is this mostly because I truly believe God and his people will be blessed?" While the following method is very helpful for implementing something, asking these questions prevents the method from manipulating people. We don't want to manipulate people; we want to tap into their motivations and lead them to do what will honor God and accomplish his purposes. Proverbs 16:2-3; 1 Corinthians 4:2-5; James 3:13-14.)
 - b. Is the new thing I want to do consistent with the six principles: honor God, assure forgiveness, glorify Christ, edify worshipers, renew covenant obligations, offer hope? (See Lesson Four and Appendix E.)
 - c. Is this the first year of my ministry at this church? If it is the first year or two you've served this church, if this new idea involves a significant change (i.e., it is not a small matter), and if you have any doubt that the new thing you want to do will be well received by the whole congregation, wait! Wait for the Lord's good timing. (Psalms 5:1-3; 27:14; 130:5-6) Exercise the fruit of the Spirit, patience. (Galatians 5:22)
 - Unless you were born and raised in the church you're serving, or you're the founder of a new church, you are viewed (with all due respect) as an outsider, and you have to gain the trust of the people in this faith community in order to have a relationship that is strong enough for them to permit you to do new things that cause a significant change in the church. Remember that changing the environment in which people live alters their sense of familiarity and comfort. People typically resist that which makes them feel uncomfortable. If the change you want to introduce is significant, wait upon the Holy Spirit to move among the people and over time build the conditions, including trusting you, that will make possible implementing the change without causing division in the church. (1 Corinthians 4:2; cf. Luke 16:10)

- 1) Ask, “How do you gain the people’s trust?” Add any of the following not mentioned: With the Spirit’s help such trust will develop over time as you
 - a) Love and care for them. (1 Corinthians 13)
 - b) Serve them in a Christlike manner. (Matthew 20:25-28)
 - c) Always speak the truth in love and never lie. (Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 3:5-9)
 - d) Model the Christlike life, including admitting when you are wrong. People can’t relate to and don’t trust someone who pretends to be perfect and who won’t take responsibility for mistakes, including sins. (Titus 2:7-8, James 3:13-16; Ephesians 4:25-5:20)
 - e) Demonstrate that your values are consistent with theirs. (See below.)
 - 2) If people don’t trust us, they won’t support our ideas for change, even if the new thing has merit. How will you know when the time is right? Through prayer and consultation with the opinion leaders of your church. (See below.)
- d. Am I perceived as a person who listens carefully to the people? (See Lesson Eight.)
 - e. Is the change I’m considering consistent with what the Bible teaches? (Galatians 1:6-10)
 - f. Is this change supported by the facts? For example, do the young people really want their music in the church worship services? (See Lesson Eight.)
 - g. Will this new thing I’m planning uproot and destroy a tradition that is meeting the needs of the people?
 - 1) Traditions meet several important human needs. For example, they help provide a sense of belonging; a sense of personal and corporate identity, stability and balance; a sense of certainty about life; and relief from many cares and concerns.¹
 - Discuss: Considering the function and benefits of traditions, what occurs when a church leader decides that the birthday celebrations of children when they become 15 years of age are inappropriate in a worship service, that they distract from the stated purpose of worship and the dialogue that God is having with his people? What can the worship leader do?
 - 2) Before trying to put into practice a new idea, it is good to ask yourself the following questions regarding any tradition that would be affected:
 - a) Is the tradition God-given or manmade?
 - b) What needs does this tradition meet?

¹ Anthony Campolo, “Home Improvement: What Does God Say to All Generations?” Lecture at Christ Church of Oak Brook, Oak Brook, Illinois, U.S.A. September 2, 1998.

- c) Will the innovation I want to implement meet all those needs the tradition was meeting and the other needs it is designed to meet?
- d) How does eliminating this tradition shape the future?
- e) Do I really need to cancel this tradition? Can it be held at a different time?
- f) How likely is it that my decision to do away with this tradition will cause a major division in the church?
- g) Is it possible this tradition will die a natural death if left alone, and I do the new thing alongside it?
- h) How do I implement the new thing most effectively? To answer this question, and the others above, it is helpful to consider what is known about how anything new is perceived and accepted or rejected by a community of people, including a church.

Important Steps to Take in Communicating Your New Idea

2. Ask the participants to return to their groups of four and discuss this question: “What have you done, or seen others do, that has resulted in a new idea, service, program, or other change to be accepted in a church?” Write the question on the flipchart. After 10 minutes, ask a representative of each group to report his or her group’s results. List them on the flipchart. Add any of the following that have not been mentioned in the group reports.
 - a. Speak with the opinion leaders in the congregation, one at a time.
 - 1) Opinion leaders are those members of the church whose views are respected by the others in the congregation. They are the people whose opinions give credibility in the eyes of the others. They are often but not always on the church board. Be sure to include in your conversations those who are not part of the official leader team but are, nevertheless, very influential persons functioning behind the scenes. Meet with them individually at a time when you can explain your new idea without being interrupted. (Notice how Barnabas, a trusted opinion leader in the early church, was helpful to Saul when he was new to the church in Jerusalem [Acts 9:26-30]. What were the effects of Barnabas’ help to Paul? [See v. 28.] Notice also how Peter’s influence was helpful to “the apostles and the brothers” in receiving the Gentiles into the church [Acts 11:2-9, 18]. Would the result have been the same, or as quickly accomplished, if one of the Gentile believers had been sent to convey this message? Why?)
 - 2) If you are not the lead, or senior, pastor of the church, and your church has a lead pastor, be sure to obtain his or her approval before talking to many others. While the lead pastor is an outsider from the people’s point of view, his or her opinion is also important to the church members. However, if you are the lead pastor, following these same steps will help you as well.

- b. When you have the support of the opinion leaders, then bring your idea to the church board.
- c. Present your new idea to the board and later to the congregation by emphasizing how the following four positive characteristics of new ideas apply to what you are advocating.
 - 1) **Advantage.** Show clearly how the change will be better than what is now in place, *according to what the people value*. Point out the advantage of your new thing over any previous way of doing something, using words that appeal to the values of the people, e.g., indicating how it is more Biblically accurate, easier or more comfortable to do, less costly, a saving in time and effort, less risky, able to provide immediacy of reward.
 - 2) **Compatibility.** Explain how your new idea is clearly compatible with the people's existing values, felt needs, and previous ideas they've respected. Assure the people by showing how the proposed change agrees with what *they* find acceptable. (Cf. Acts 17:22-28, where the Apostle Paul demonstrates his compatibility with the men of Athens. In verse 28 he quotes from Greek poets, with whom the Athenians would be familiar. Paul did so in other places as well, e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:33 and Titus 1:12.) For example, with the question of celebrating birthdays during the worship service, help people understand the purpose of the worship service (as a dialogue with God in the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection) by referring to the Bible passages we've studied, for they value God's Word as their authority. Appeal to what they value for both the need to change and to validate the new time you suggest to celebrate birthdays when all the people are together in the sanctuary, e.g., after the Benediction.
 - 3) **Observability.** Provide an opportunity for the people to observe your new idea in practice. The easier it is for people to see a new thing in operation and the results of something new before committing to it, the more likely they'll agree to at least trying it. If it can't be observed as yet in your church, is there another church or place where the people can see your new idea at work and the results it is having?

One participant told of how his church's youth group was using African musical instruments, clapping, and dancing in its worship times exactly as many in the congregation wanted to do in the church's regular worship services. When one of the leading elders visited the youth group as it was worshiping and observed how their worship was consistent with the six Biblical principles and other values of the church, he reported at the next meeting of the church board that he no longer opposed using African musical instruments, clapping, and dancing in the church worship services.

- 4) **Trialability.** Present the change as an opportunity that can be discontinued if the church later desires. Promise that the new idea can be tried for a specified period of time, and if it doesn't work out they can go back to what they were doing previously. When people try a new thing long enough, they tend to like it.

- d. **Complexity.** Be sure to avoid one aspect of a new thing that tends to cause people to reject it: the appearance that it is difficult to understand or use; that it is complex. The harder it seems to comprehend, put into practice, and predict the results of something new, the less likely people will accept it. Your new thing may actually be quite simple to understand and use, but if it even appears complex, people will tend to turn away from it. Leaders should keep explanations simple and concise. The new thing should not appear complex either in concept or in use.²
- e. Ask these questions: “If someone, who looks, thinks, and acts differently from you and others in your circle of friends and acquaintances, comes to you and wants you to do try something new, how likely are you to seriously consider doing so? Now, if someone else who looks, thinks, acts, talks, and lives like you and your friends asks you to do the same thing the first person asked you to do, would you be more inclined to respond positively?” Most people would obviously be more receptive to the second person.
- 1) Therefore, demonstrate your similarity to the people, that you share their values, interests, and other social characteristics. The degree to which people see their leaders as similar to them, the more receptive they are to what the leaders would like to do. Always remember that those of us who are church leaders, coming in from somewhere else, are perceived by the local people as outsiders; trust needs to develop over time. To facilitate that trust, model in as many ways as possible, in what you do as well as in what you say, how you are similar to them.³
 - 2) Recall what the Apostle Paul did in relating to people who viewed him as an outsider. See 1 Corinthians 9:22, including the whole context, verses 19-23. We’ve already noted Paul’s skillful use of similarity in Acts 17:23 and 28 in his demonstration of his compatibility with the men of Athens. For other Biblical examples of this important communication method, see Acts 16:3, 21:23-24, 22:2.
- f. Establish credibility by walking the talk in Christlikeness. (1 John 2:6; Philippians 2:5; John 15:12.) The church knows that “words are cheap;” that many people will say anything you want them to hear, but they don’t do what they say. Jesus had strong words to say about such hypocrites and others who are false and phony. (E.g., Matthew 7:13-29; 23:1-39) The church knows, as do many in business, that trust is established with a credible track record over time.
- g. Outlast the opposition by committing to a long-term ministry in that church and loving the people, including opponents. (Matthew 5:44)

Two Crucial Steps to Take after the Congregation Approves your Idea

3. Once a church has accepted your new thing, it is important to recognize and act on two realities that often follow. Ask the group, “What do you expect these two realities are?”

² Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4th ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1995), pp. 212-251.

³ Rogers, p. 286 ff.

Mention the following if the group does not identify them: Leaders cannot assume that the change will automatically last or produce the desired effects.

- a. **Continue to emphasize the benefits of the new thing as long as any question remains in people's minds.** Many if not most people continue to think about major decisions they have made for some time afterward. They also listen to negative information from those who have been opposed to the new thing. Following further thought, people often reject new things they have chosen, and sometimes they accept things they have initially rejected. Therefore, after taking the above steps and succeeding in putting into practice your new thing, don't assume the change will remain as it is.⁴

For example, one church agreed to a new time for its morning worship service. The church leader who was in charge of the change process and who worked the hardest to have that change approved by the congregation then went on vacation, figuring his work was done, as did others who helped him. When he and the others returned home two weeks later, they found that the congregation had met and voted to return to the original time for their worship services! The leaders should have continued to monitor the talk in the congregation and should have reminded them of the values of the new time (applying the four positive characteristics of a new idea): its advantages over the previous time for worship; compatibility with the people's existing values, felt needs, and previous ideas they've respected; encouraging them to observe its benefits in other churches that were using that time for their worship; and agreeing to try it for a specified period of time (much longer than two weeks!), such as a year.

- b. **Monitor the consequences of the new thing.** Whenever something new is put into practice, it is possible that other changes will occur that were not able to be predicted when the new thing was begun. No leader is all knowing, and well-intentioned changes sometimes produce unplanned and undesirable outcomes. For the first year or more, keep looking for any of these unplanned changes that may not be desirable. If you discover any, act to alter them so that the new thing will not be rejected.⁵
- However, it must be kept in mind that there are musical sounds and/or instruments varying from culture to culture that are commonly used with communication with the supernatural. A certain rhythm or instrument sound that one associates with pagan worship has those connotations within a given culture (the musical triggers are typically culture bound and don't transfer across cultures). Instruments are made with charms or markings put on them to refer to the supernatural forces. Amulets are believed to have impersonal magic power.

Raise the question with the participants as to whether these instruments should be used. Certainly the charms should be taken off the instruments, but it may take more than just removing the charms or markings to make the instruments holy to the Lord

⁴ Rogers, p. 180 ff.

⁵ Rogers, pp. 150, 405 ff.

and useable in Christian worship. Since the people know the significance of the charms and markings and even the particular instrument itself, they will be able to tell what needs to be done with the music and instruments in that tribe and/or locale in order to be able to use such musical genre or instrumentation in the church. Can a new instrument be made, that may look similar but be sufficiently different, e.g., slightly larger, as to help the people disassociate it from the pagan rituals, which association would be counterproductive to their and others' Christian worship? Many in Africa say that new instruments should be used, but if an instrument were once dedicated to an African spirit it could be a stumbling block to some people's faith in Christ, as in the text box that follows. (Cf. Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8-10) Regarding music can a new song with different melodic formulas be used in church than the melodies in the songs they used in ceremonies where the people were trying to be possessed? In some places it may be necessary to omit songs and other music formerly used specifically in demonic services even though they are now addressed to the Triune God who is revealed in the Bible. The former associations may undermine the developing faith of those just coming to Christ. To do so would be contrary to the teaching of the Bible (cf., e.g., the above texts) and dishonor God.

In Africa, e.g., can African music, instruments, and gestures be used in Christian worship? The answer is generally yes, but the significance to the worshipers of the cultural meanings attached to these aspects of worship must be carefully considered and modified as necessary in order to be used in a way that honors God and is in accord with the rest of the six guiding principles as well.

In one of the workshops in Africa in which this course has been taught, an attendee observed that the six principles of Biblical theology permitted introducing African instruments and movements, such as clapping and dancing, in worship services. However, he said that when such is done, it sometimes triggers a demonic outburst by a person in the service who has been involved in pagan worship. If nothing were done, that negative outcome would violate the six principles of Christian public worship, e.g., honor God, and cause people to want to eliminate the use of African instruments and movements. Therefore, a plan was established to quickly escort the demon-possessed person to another room, where a faithful church member would exorcise the demon by commanding it in the name of Jesus Christ to leave the person, thus allowing the worship service to continue "in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40) as planned.

4. For any of the cognitive objectives you have not as yet observed the stated behavior, distribute file cards as needed, and ask the students to give you the stipulated responses. Be sure to ask them to sign their name on each card. Or, you can verbally ask the class, corporately in session or selected representative individuals, and/or those about whom you have a special concern, in or outside the class (especially outside and individually for those about whom you are concerned in order to avoid embarrassment and to facilitate their responses), to do the behaviors specified in the objectives. Review the instruction as needed, for any objectives that are not accomplished as you intend them to be. Doing so in class, will

help those who need the remedial assistance and be a good memory refresher and reinforcer for those who have accomplished the objectives.

Action Plan Steps for Lesson Nine

5. Say to the group, “For the remaining time in this session, continue to construct your Action Plans. First individually, then in your groups of four, reflect on these questions.” Write them on the flipchart. Add any questions that may be helpful.
 - a. Identify the new thing you want to do.
 - b. Answer the seven initial questions.
 - c. Think of the names of the opinion leaders with whom you need to meet. With whom should you meet first? Then who?
 - d. Select a change you want to make, such as one of those you’ve indicated in your work in earlier sessions on your Action Plan, and do the following:
 - 1) identify its advantages over what the church has been doing previously;
 - 2) indicate its compatibility with the people’s existing values, felt needs, and previous ideas they’ve respected;
 - 3) describe how you will encourage the people to observe its benefits, e.g., in other churches that may be doing this new thing;
 - 4) identify a period of time you ask them to agree to try it, such as six months, or, preferably, a year;
 - 5) describe how you will make it simple to understand, implement, and predict the results of the change.
 - e. What else do you need to do to increase the likelihood that your new thing will be accepted by the congregation? For further information on this subject, see my essay, [“Defusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the Church.”](#)
6. As worship leaders we often need to plan services for special occasions, such as weddings, funerals, public crises, evangelism and others. Our next lesson will provide resources for planning corporate worship on such occasions.
7. Offer a closing prayer for application.

Planning Worship Services for Other Occasions

Needs of the Learners:

1. Felt Needs:
 - a. See Lesson One section on felt needs.
 - b. Include here the needs the students identified in Lesson One that are applicable to the subjects in this lesson.
2. Unfelt Needs:

All the students need to learn the Biblical teaching on, and how to develop and implement, the following competencies:

 - a. How and why a public worship service is needed in at least five significant life situations.
 - b. How to plan worship services for special occasions, such as for those who are shut-in, for weddings, healing, funerals, public crises, celebrations and evangelistic services.

Goal: This lesson will help pastors, worship leaders, and others to plan worship services for special occasions. At the conclusion of this session the participants will add to their specific Action Plan ways to implement these teachings of the Bible in their own churches.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson each participant will be able to do the following:

1. Identify and explain, verbally or on a 3 x 5 card, at least five life occasions where a Christian public worship service is needed to connect with God in order to function well in those special times in life and at least one Biblical text as the basis for each service.
2. For all five special occasion worship services in this lesson, identify, verbally or in writing on a 3 x 5 card, at least one need that worship service will meet on that occasion.
3. Identify and explain, verbally or in writing, how each of the five worship services will include the six Biblical/theological principles for the planning and content of that worship service.
4. During this lesson, the teacher will observe only positive affective nonverbal feedback (e.g., interest, enthusiasm, excitement, and joy) and hear no complaints when identifying and explaining the meaning, significance, importance, and Biblical basis for including all the steps in planning worship services for special occasions.
5. By the end of the course, at least 75% of the class members will demonstrate their affective interest by asking at least one question or making at least one positive comment in class, or with the teacher at break times, either verbally or in writing.
6. By the end of this course, at least 75% of the class will report to the teacher, verbally or in writing, that they feel confident in planning worship services for special occasions and are motivated to do so.
7. Add to the Action Plan for the church(es) he or she is serving, at least one idea from this lesson that he or she wants to implement and at least one SMART step to do so.
8. Within three months of the end of this course, all the students will have begun to implement at least three elements of their Action Plan pertaining to this lesson within the congregation(s) they serve.

Materials Needed

1. The first three materials listed in Lesson One.
2. At least one 3 x 5 file card for each participant. These are always helpful for many purposes.

This lesson will take four hours to teach effectively in its entirety. If you do not have that much time, the following options are possible: (1) The lesson can be taught in two two-hour segments with the division between the first three and next four special occasional services. (2) The lesson can be (translated if need be and) printed out and distributed as homework prior to the lesson, or the teacher can assign reading the lesson on the [Christian Worship](#) page of my Website. (3) The teacher can summarize the information pertaining to each of the seven occasional services, before the participants begin their work in their small groups. (4) The teacher can select only the services that will be most helpful to the participants, and use them as examples for planning the other services and eliminate the class discussion of those others to fit within the time frame.

Prior to the workshop arrive early and arrange the seating in seven circles, preferably around tables if possible. If tables are used, make the following seven subject labels for each on folded 5 x 8 cards or paper: Sick or Shut-in Service; Healing Service; Wedding; Funeral; Public Crisis Service; Celebration Service; Evangelism Service. Write out the questions for each type of service in this lesson on a flipchart page before the class begins. When the people arrive, tell them to sit anywhere they choose at first.

Introduction

1. Ask the question, “Do you have worship services for special occasions, such as for those who are shut-in and also for healing, weddings, funerals, public crises, and celebrations?”
 - a. If the participants answer “Yes,” affirm their doing so and say that we’ll very much value their help as we proceed in this lesson.
 - b. Whether they answer “Yes” or “No,” point out that all these events are very significant experiences in the lives of God’s covenant people and those who will be entering his covenant. These are occasions where the people have needs that will be uniquely met through the special blessings that come from meeting with God and fellow believers in worship at such times, which is the subject for our lesson today. Also say that sometimes it is good to hold evangelistic services, and we’ll also undertake that subject as well.
2. Mention that for much of the lesson we’ll work in small groups, but probably not the same ones as earlier in the workshop. At this time ask the participants to stand up and move to the group location where they would like to work (e.g., shut-in service, healing, wedding, evangelism service). Suggest they make their selection on the basis of either a special service they have coming up soon, or on the basis of a service they would like to offer but have not as yet provided, or on the basis of one they’ve conducted in a particular area that went well and for which they’d like to contribute information to the discussion and also learn more.
 - Explain that first we’ll cover some basic information about each service as a large group, and then each small group will use what we’ve discussed in this and in preceding lessons

to plan a service in the area of its focus. Begin by leading the discussions below for each of the special occasion services.

3. Read a brief Bible passage related to today's lesson and offer prayer. In preparing a worship service for a special occasion, the first step is to identify the needs and conditions that will affect your planning. Ask yourself, "What are the needs and circumstances this worship service must address?" Other matters are also important to include, and several are unique to each type of worship service. They will be considered in each of the following sections.

A Worship Service for Those Who Are Sick or Shut-in

1. In preparing a worship service for those who are confined to their home or to a public facility, such as a rest home, it is important to begin by identifying the needs and conditions that will affect your planning. As a whole group answer the question: "What are the needs and circumstances this worship service will have to deal with?" Refer to the questions on the flipchart and record the answers as they are given. Add any of the following not mentioned. Ask the participants to add any other responses they come up with in their small groups when they give their group reports.

- a. Consider the needs of shut-ins that the service should meet.

- 1) Subjects: anger; anxiety for loved ones; fear of the future, of death; regret and forgiveness; forgiveness; illness; loneliness; worry; thanksgiving for life, spouse, children, grandchildren; and much else?

- 2) Resources: Bible, communion elements? (As great a blessing as the sacrament is for worshipers in regular services, it is especially so for those shut-in who can thereby have such a tangible experience of Christ's presence and their connection with God's historic covenant community, the church, the body of Christ.) Hymn(s), especially one or more well-known and loved by, the shut-in person that are appropriate for this occasion.

- a) Bible Reading:

- 1- Anger: Psalm 37; Matthew 5:38-48; 18:21-35; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Ephesians 4.

- 2- Anxiety for loved ones: Genesis 17:7; Psalms 37:25-26; 103:1-17; 121; Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 7:1-16; Acts 2:39; Galatians 3:6-8, 29; Philippians 1:3-6; 4:4-13.

- 3- Fear of the future, of death: Psalm 121; Matthew 6:25-34; John 11:1-44; 14:1-21; 20; Romans 8:31-39; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5:8 (Note especially that the verb "We are confident" in the original Greek is in the indicative mood, meaning a denoted state that is an objective fact, and is in the present tense and active voice, meaning a continuous ongoing action; notice also the verbs "to be away...and at home" in the original Greek are infinitives in the aorist tense and active voice, indicating once for all and a momentary

occurrence; this means that at the moment of death Paul expects to be with the Lord immediately; cf. the verb “to depart” in Philippians 1:23); Revelation 14:13.

4- Forgiveness: Psalms 51; 103; Isaiah 1:18; 43:25; Matthew 6:9-15; 18:21-35; Luke 15; Romans 7:15-25; 8:1; Philemon; 1 John 1:5-10.

5- Illness: Psalms 6; 41:1-4, 13; 103.

6- Loneliness: Psalms 23; 27, 91; 139:1-18; John 14:15-21; Romans 8:28-39.

7- Worry: Psalm 37:25-26; Matthew 6:19-34; 1 Timothy 6:6-12; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Philippians 4:4-13.

- b) Bible; liturgy; communion set, including small cups, bread, red wine or red grape juice; olive oil (James 5:14)
 - c) Other resources?
- b. Identify the expected circumstances of a worship service for sick or shut-in people.
- 1) Where will the service be: in a living room, a bedroom in a house, an institution?
 - 2) Who will be calling on the shut-in(s): the church leader alone? with an elder?
 - 3) What is the context?
 - a) What is the sick or shut-in person’s condition? This factor affects the time you have available for a service and may require brevity. Of course this situation will vary with the individual(s). Some may be bedridden or be able to sit in one place or concentrate for only 10 minutes or less; some may be barely conscious; others may be able to concentrate for half an hour or longer. Can the person(s) see? hear? talk?
 - b) Will there be potential interferences, such as other people moving about, radios or televisions on, airport noise? If so, try to eliminate or minimize such interference, e.g., by asking that radios and televisions be turned off during the service.
 - 4) Other circumstances?
- c. The following is a model. It is not intended that this should be normative. Church leaders should feel free to add or otherwise change parts to meet the needs of the specific sick or shut-in people being served. It can be used with one person lying in a bed at home, in a hospital or rest home, or with many in a rest home chapel.

GATHERING TO GOD

Call to Worship
Psalm/Hymn/Song (Praise) [If possible]
Prayer of Confession
Assurance of Pardon
Summary of the Law
Doxology/Gloria Patri
Psalter Reading

PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD

Prayer for Illumination
Bible Reading
Message or Brief Reflections
Prayer for Blessing on the Word
Passing the Peace
Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Psalm/Hymn/Song (Thanksgiving) [If possible]
Confession of Faith [If possible]
Commitment to Obey God's Word
General Prayers
Prayer and Anointing with Laying on of Hands
Psalm/Hymn/Song (Application) [If possible]

GOD'S SENDING OF US TO SERVE HIM

Benediction

Lives lived in service to God throughout the week (Romans 12:1-2)

How would this apply in a rest home where people cannot leave?
(E.g., include living with a sense of outreach to others in the residential community and beyond for those who are able to communicate via phone, mail, news media, the Internet, prayer)

- d. What do the six principles suggest as to what to include and not include in this basic model for planning the worship service for shut-in people?
- e. If the persons on whom you are calling are able and would like to sing, this is a very helpful, uplifting, inspiring, strengthening, and encouraging experience. Songbooks or hymnbooks are not needed; sing a cappella from memory if possible, even just one verse. Keep in mind that people who have had a stroke and certain other mental disorders are sometimes unable to speak, but they can hear, and often they can sing and do so with obvious joy! Especially powerful are the theologically profound hymns they have sung from childhood. See Matthew 26:30, where Jesus sang a hymn with his disciples, even in

those moments just before his greatest suffering. We see in his doing so the way for us to worship in song even while experiencing dreadful distress.

- f. Anointing with olive oil has been used from ancient times for medicinal purposes and in the Bible also especially as an outward sign of the healing God will do in response to prayer offered in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (James 5:14-15) Anointing with oil in the Bible signifies being separated to God, designated for a special calling and work, and being divinely equipped for that service, usually for the offices of priest, prophet, and king (cf. 1 Samuel 9:16, 1 Kings 19:16), all of whom pointed to Christ (the Messiah, the Hebrew word for anointed one, referred to as *chriō* in Greek, from which the word Christ comes). Christ fulfilled all three offices.
- g. The laying on of hands has been used throughout the Bible to communicate the transfer of power, qualities, or blessings from the Holy Spirit through one called and gifted human being to another. Thus, the laying on of hands is only done by one in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. This is why it is very unwise, as some pastors are now doing, to invite the whole congregation, which in corporate public worship includes visitors, some of whom may not be believers in Christ and in other Biblical truths, to come forward and lay their hands on a person or, in the cases where many come forward, lay their hands on persons in front of them who are laying their hands on someone.

The symbolism of the laying on of hands likely comes from the understanding that the hand is the main organ of touch in humans. Thus, this practice is a means of transferring power, qualities, and blessings from one person to another, and since the head is the noblest part of a human being, the hands are typically placed on the recipient's head. A guide for the laying on of hands and anointing with oil follows in the service for Christian healing, which can be adapted for use in this service for those who are sick or shut-in.

Planning a Service for Christian Healing

- 2. In preparing a worship service for Christian healing, it is also important to begin by identifying the needs and conditions that will affect your planning. As a whole group, discuss the question: "What are the needs and circumstances this worship service will have to deal with?" Refer to the questions on the flipchart and record the answers as they are given. Add any of the following not mentioned. Ask the participants to add any other responses they come up with in their small groups when they give their group reports.
 - a. Consider the felt and unfelt needs of those who attend that the service should meet.
 - 1) Subjects: Assurance of God's presence and all-sufficient help; desire to be healed; need for hope, fellowship, joy. Other(s)?
 - 2) Resources: Bible, musicians, anointing oil, cushions for kneeling, others?
 - a) Bible Reading
 - 1- Assurance of God's presence: Joshua 1:5; Haggai 1:13; Matthew 28:20.
 - 2- Hope: John 14:13-14; 1 John 5:13-15; James 5:13-16.

- 3- Fellowship: 1 John 1:5-7; Romans 12:3-18.
- 4- Joy: 1 Kings 8:65-66; 2 Chronicles 30:23; Galatians 5:22.

- b) If there are to be musicians, do you know, have you met with and given them the Bible text(s) you will be presenting, and have you approved, the music? Will any music planned be appropriate, including all verses of any with lyrics being consistent with God's Word, the Bible? Do not permit any unbiblical verses or music that is also in any other way inappropriate for worship.
- b. Identify the circumstances to be expected in planning a worship service in which this special occasion will be celebrated. Following are some; can you think of any others?
- 1) Where will the service be held? In the church Sanctuary or a chapel?
 - 2) If the service is not in the sanctuary, will there be potential interferences?
 - 3) Are visitors invited and/or expected? What hospitality is required for them (e.g., space close to the front for those with special needs, such as those who are hard of hearing, who don't see well, who are using walkers or in wheel chairs)?
 - 4) Are any special musical instruments and musicians needed?
 - 5) Are any special artifacts needed? (E.g., olive oil for anointing if desired)
- c. Now review your previous lessons and use those principles in your small group to prepare a worship service for the occasion you and your group have selected. Be sure to include the following items, which you may want to do again by division of labor.
- 1) What will you include in the four main segments of worship: Gathering to God, Proclaiming God's Word, Responding to God's Word, and Receiving God's benedictory blessing in sending us back into the world for his service?
 - 2) What subjects will you include in the prayers? (Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication?)
 - 3) What do the six principles suggest as to what to include and not include in the service?
 - a) After discussion as done throughout this course, for what to include see the model that follows and make any needed additions, subtractions, and/or other modifications.
 - b) If you are thinking of including the Lord's Supper in this healing service, be very careful to consider who will be attending this worship service. Specifically, will non-Christians or Christians who are under church discipline, or who should be under church discipline, likely to be present? Has this worship service been advertised and, if so, to what segment of the population? To your community, which includes non-Christians? Your congregation only, which may include non-Christian attendees?

These questions are very important. If non-Christians could be in attendance, the sacrament of the Holy Communion should either not be offered in this service, or it should be preceded by a period of self-examination (*op cit.*) This is a *Healing Service*. How ironic as well as unbiblical and cruel it would be to offer the Lord's Supper to nonbelievers and to those who are, or should be, under church discipline and thereby *increase* their physical illness and spiritual death, as the Apostle Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32: "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep."

The Lord's Supper is one of the three means of grace (together with Baptism and the proclamation of the Word) that God has provided for his believers, which typically should be offered only after a period of instruction and to those who are members in good standing of a church congregation committed to, and abiding by, God's Word. We must not facilitate anyone eating and drinking judgment upon him or herself. (1 Corinthians 11:29) This concern far overrides the emotionally driven current desire by some to use the sacraments as an expression of hospitality. Pertaining to the Lord's Supper, there are many other ways to offer loving, warm, caring, and welcoming hospitality that do not contain the dangers of the unwarranted use of the body and blood of the Lord. Traditionally, this practice has been called "fencing, or guarding, the Lord's Table," and has been done by most denominations throughout church history, primarily to protect the bread and the cup from misuse and to protect those who partake from severe spiritual harm. For more, see [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology](#).

4) Consider the following model.

GATHERING TO GOD

Call to Worship

Psalm/Hymn/Song (Praise) [If possible]

Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Pardon

The Law and/or Summary of the Law

Psalter Reading (e.g., Psalm 30:1-3) and Gloria Patri

PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD

Prayer for Illumination

Bible Reading

Sermon

Prayer for Blessing on the Word

Passing the Peace

Psalm, Hymn, or Song (Application)

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Confession of Faith [If possible]
Commitment to Obey God's Word
Offering
Psalm/Hymn/Song (Thanksgiving) [If possible]
General Prayers
Prayer for Healing
Laying on of Hands and Anointing with Oil
Prayer of Thanksgiving
Psalm/Hymn/Song (Application) [If possible]

GOD'S SENDING OF US TO SERVE HIM

Benediction
Lives lived in service to God throughout the week (Romans 12:1-2)

- d. For the Prayer for Healing of those who have come to this worship service, this prayer can be offered with everyone remaining seated in the congregation. These prayers can be offered in other ways also. These various ways can be used separately or together.
- 1) A Litany of Intercession for Healing such as this one from the *Liturgy and Confessions*¹ of the Reformed Church in America can be used.

LITANY OF INTERCESSION FOR HEALING

[Pastor:] O God the Father, whose will for us and for all your people is health and salvation;

[People:] **Have mercy on us.**

O God the Son, who came that we might have life and have it in abundance;

Have mercy on us.

O God the Holy Spirit, whose indwelling makes our bodies the temples of your presence;

Have mercy on us.

O Triune God, we pray you to hear us, and that you will grant your grace to all who stand in need of healing both of body and spirit, and lead them to look with confidence to you;

We beseech you to hear us, O Lord.

¹ *Liturgy and Confessions*, 1990, Reformed Church Press, Reformed Church in America, pp. 2-3.

That you will grant patience and perseverance to all who are disabled by injury or illness, and increase their courage;

We beseech you to hear us, O Lord.

That you will grant peace to all who are troubled by confusion or pain, and set their minds at rest;

We beseech you to hear us, O Lord.

That you will grant relief from suffering to all sick children, and give them a sure sense of your tender love and care;

We beseech you to hear us, O Lord.

That you will grant rest to all whose increasing years bring weariness, distress or loneliness, and give them the abiding comfort of your presence;

We beseech you to hear us, O Lord.

That you will grant confidence to all about to undergo surgery or difficult procedures, and keep them free from fear;

We beseech you to hear us, O Lord.

That you will grant [memory of] purpose to the Church as it seeks to carry on Christ's ministry of healing to suffering humanity, and keep it always true to the Gospel of Christ;

We beseech you to hear us, O Lord.

That you will grant skill [wisdom, compassion, perseverance, and protection] to doctors, nurses, technicians, aides, and all who are called to practice medical arts, and make strong their dedication to help others;

We beseech you to hear us, O Lord.

That you will grant to all people the refreshment of quiet sleep and joy of resting in your everlasting arms, that we may rejoice in your care while we are on earth, and in the world to come have eternal life;

We beseech you to hear us, O Lord.

*The Litany may continue with petitions for specific needs of the people.
It may conclude with the following ascription:*

O God, who in Jesus Christ called us out of the darkness into your marvelous light; enable us always to declare your wonderful deeds, thank you for your steadfast love, and praise you with heart, soul, mind, and strength, now and forever. **Amen.**

- 2) Another way the Prayer for Healing has been done, including at a church I served, is to have everyone who wants prayer for healing to fill out a card with only their first name and the condition for which they want to be healed. At this time in the service they came forward to the chancel, where cushions were spread out across the front of the chancel. Beside each cushion was a pastor or elder, and when a cushion was unoccupied, people would come forward and hand their card to the pastor or elder, who would then read the request and ask briefly for clarification and any further information needed, including what specifically the person wants to have included in the prayer. Then the pastor or elder kneels with the person requesting healing, lays a hand on the person's head, and prays for that person's healing. Over many years holding this service, we heard amazing reports of God healing many people.
- e. For the Laying on of Hands and Anointing with Oil, a guide such as this one from the *Liturgy and Confessions*² of the Reformed Church in America may be used.

LAYING ON OF HANDS AND ANOINTING WITH OIL

Luke 9:1-2 and/or James 5:13-16 shall be read: After which the minister shall invite worshipers to receive the laying on of hands and anointing with oil using these or similar words:

In the name of the Lord Jesus who sent forth his disciples to preach the kingdom of God and to heal, we invite you who wish to receive the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil to come forward or summon us to come to your side.

We invite all here present to participate in this act of faith through the offering of silent prayers for those who seek Christian healing.

Since healing is a ministry of the church it is appropriate that the minister be joined by one or two elders, or such persons as the board of elders may designate, for the laying on of hands. The minister or an elder may also anoint the worshiper with oil following the blessing.

May the hands of the Great Physician, Jesus Christ, rest upon you now in divine blessing and healing. May the cleansing stream of his pure life fill your whole being, body, mind and spirit, to strengthen and heal you. **Amen.**

or

Eternal God, for Jesus' sake, send your Holy Spirit upon your servant N. _____: drive away all sickness of body and spirit; make whole that which is broken. Grant deliverance from the power of evil, and true faith in Jesus Christ our Lord, who suffered on our behalf but also rose from death so that we, too, could live. In his name we pray. **Amen.**

² *Liturgy and Confessions*, 1990, Reformed Church Press, Reformed Church in America, p. 4.

A brief silence may be kept after the last worshiper has been anointed.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

After all have returned to their places the minister may offer the following or another appropriate thanksgiving prayer.

Most gracious God, source of all healing; we give thanks to you for all your gifts but most of all for the gift of your [only begotten] Son, through whom you gave and still give health and salvation to all who believe. As we wait in expectation for the coming of that day when suffering and pain shall be no more, help us by your Holy Spirit to be assured of your power in our lives and to trust in your eternal love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A Wedding Service

3. In preparing a wedding service it is also important to begin by identifying the needs and conditions that will affect your planning. As a whole group answer the question: “What are the needs and circumstances this worship service will have to deal with?” Refer to the questions on the flipchart and record the answers as they are given. Add any of the following not mentioned. Ask the participants to add any other responses they come up with in their small groups when they give their group reports.
 - a. Consider the felt and unfelt needs of wedding participants that the service should meet.
 - 1) Participants: the couple being married, any children from a previous marriage, parents, wedding party, guests, musicians.
 - 2) Subjects pertaining to the participants:
 - a) Couple being married: Sense of God’s presence, his Word to them for their marriage, and his blessing upon them; their commitment to him, to each other, and to the covenant community assembled; a well-planned and well-conducted wedding service.
 - b) Any children from a previous marriage: Sadness, and/or anger, and/or blame about the impossibility of restoration of their parents’ marriage; anxiety about the permanence of marriage; concern about their relationship with their new stepfather or stepmother.
 - c) Parents: Sense of God’s presence and his Word to their children being married and his Word for their marriage; a well-planned and well-conducted wedding service.
 - d) Wedding party: Sense of God’s presence and his Word for marriage; knowing what they are to do and when.

- e) Guests: Sense of God's presence and his Word for marriage; a well-planned and well-conducted wedding service.
 - f) Musicians: Sense of God's presence and his Word for marriage; knowing what and when to sing and play music. Have you met with them for this purpose?
- 3) Resources: Bible, ring(s), wedding certificates, kneeling bench, musicians? Others?
- a) Bible texts: Genesis 1:26-28; Psalms 22:25-31; 37:3-6; Matthew 5:13-16; Luke 6:36-38; John 15:9-14; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Galatians 5:22-26; Ephesians 3:14-21; 5: 21-33; Philippians 2:1-11; Colossians 3:12-19; 1 John 4:7-19.
 - b) Liturgy
 - c) Wedding certificates
 - d) Kneeling bench
 - e) If there is to be music, have you met with the musician(s), and have you approved, what he, she, or they will be signing? Is the music appropriate, including especially that the lyrics are consistent with God's Word, the Bible? Do not permit any unbiblical verses or music that is also in any other way inappropriate for worship in a Christian, Biblically-based, wedding service that honors God.
- b. Identify the circumstances to be expected in planning a worship service for a wedding.
- 1) Has there been a sufficient time of pre-marital counseling?
 - a) Do both profess faith in Jesus Christ as their only Savior and Lord, and are they engaged in the sanctification process, i.e., demonstrating evidence in their daily lives that they are maturing in Christlikeness, following the Lord by obeying his Word, including both of them attending worship and Bible study opportunities together, and with other Christians, regularly? It is very clear in God's Word that it is his will that his people do not marry a non-Christian. See for example, Romans 10:9; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 1 Corinthians 7:39; Malachi 2:11; Ezra 9:1-2 and 3-10:44; Nehemiah 10:30; Exodus 34:16; Genesis 26:34-35; 27:42-28:1 ff.; Deuteronomy 7:3-6; James 2:26) How then can a Christian pastor, who is accountable to God (cf. James 3:1), ever disobediently join a Christian and a non-Christian in holy matrimony? If you have ever done so, ask God for his forgiveness in Christ, and stop officiating in such weddings.
 - b) Have either been divorced? If so, prior to the wedding, have you counseled with the couple? Is this marriage Biblical? Is either, or are both, currently married to someone else?

For example, one day a man and his girlfriend came to my office and asked me to conduct a wedding for them. The man was already married to someone else, who I knew. I asked the man if he had made an honest attempt to reconcile with his wife. He asked what “an honest attempt to reconcile” would include. I said, it would have to begin with discontinuing his relationship with his girlfriend and to stop seeing and communicating with her. He would have to wholeheartedly recommit to the Lord, to his marriage vows, and to doing all he could to restore his relationship with his wife and to save his marriage. I then explained the other steps. Such counseling is not easy, but it is necessary to be faithful to God and his will.

- c) Have sins been confessed and the problems been worked through in accord with God’s Word?
 - d) Are there children from a previous marriage (either where one of the partners has died or there has been a divorce)? If so, have the challenges of a blended family been considered and prepared for? Have you counseled with the children and parents together? Are the children included in the worship service? Is not only their presence acknowledged, but (if they are old enough) are questions asked of them to which they respond at an appropriate point in the service? For example, will they commit to God that they will also honor and obey their stepmother or stepfather?
 - e) Have the couple’s expectations for each other been identified, discussed, and agreed upon? If either or both were in a previous marriage, does each understand what went wrong with the previous marriage and why it couldn’t be saved? Very commonly, divorced people tend to marry someone like their previous spouse, and the same problems reoccur. Are their expectations realistic? These are very important premarital counseling questions and address some of the main reasons why most second and subsequent marriages fail. See my essay and premarital manual, “[Guidelines for Selecting a Marriage Partner \(Unabridged Version\)](#).”³
 - f) Does the couple have any special challenges, e.g., hostile relations with parents, infirmities, working conditions that could negatively impact their marriage and that will affect the wedding service?
- 2) Where will the service be: in the church (preferably), in a home, out of doors, elsewhere?
 - 3) How many people will be attending?
 - 4) How large is the wedding party?
 - 5) What kind of music will there be?

³ This essay and premarital education curriculum is on the Marriage page of my general Website at www.fromacorntoak12.com and on my academic Website at <https://seelyedward.academia.edu/>.

- 6) Are any people coming who need special care, e.g., who are infirmed?
- 7) Other circumstances?
- c. Review your previous lessons, and use their principles in your small group to prepare a worship service for the wedding. Be sure to include the following items, which you may want each group to do as a whole or to do by division of labor; i.e., certain members of your group could work on just one of the following questions and report to the rest of your group when you put together your presentation for all the workshop participants. (NOTE TO THE LEADER: The division of labor approach will be the easiest for you to monitor to assure that the task is completed. If the whole small group takes each of the following questions, they may not complete all the questions in the time allowed. You'll likely have to watch all the groups carefully to keep them on task and make sure they don't become bogged down in too much detail or in other issues.)
- 1) It is important to include all the key elements of the traditional Christian wedding service. This is good instruction not only for the couple, but for all who attend the wedding, that the absolutely most important part of their marriage is their commitment to the Triune God, including their conscious daily walking in his ways, and their lifelong commitment to each other. [Those marriages in Christ do well](#), significantly much better than average. As a pastor for well over half a century, I observe that if married couples would remember their wedding, and in particular their vows, and act accordingly, most all the problems they encounter in marriage can be prevented, avoided, and overcome. Many contemporary weddings completely leave out or severely modify the traditional liturgical components, the omission of which deprives the couple of very important parts of their wedding, and vital aspects of marriage, and also deprives the other married attendees (as well as those wanting to be married, longing for hope, and looking for God's guidance) an opportunity to remember and reflect upon their own wedding and marriage service, during which many, if not most, if not all of whom, did not listen carefully when they were married. Here we see one way the edification dimension of worship occurs in the wedding. **Notice the especially vital dimensions of marriage that are included in the liturgy, and be sure to discuss them in your [premarital counseling sessions](#) with the couple, including as you go through the whole liturgy, so they understand each part...for the wedding...and for always!**
- a) The traditional wedding ceremony in Reformed churches begins with a statement called the Votum. The word, votum, is a Latin word meaning desire, and the use of the word desire in the opening statement of a worship service indicates the recognition and expression of the worshipers' desire that their whole lives, including this worship service, and including their marriage, is lived in the acknowledgement of God's help in all ways always. God is our help and our only hope for daily and eternal well-being.

Votum

Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 124:8)

- b) At the beginning of the actual wedding ceremony part of the worship service, a declaration of purpose should be stated, which emphasizes the Biblical basis of the ceremony and the couple's marriage in Christ. The traditional opening declaration⁴ is as follows:

Then the minister shall say to all present: [Rubrics in red guide the pastor as to what to say and when. Notice how God is honored and the crucial aspects of marriage are included in this wedding service but which are omitted in many if not most contemporary weddings.]

Dearly beloved, we are assembled here in the sight of God and in the presence of this company to join this man and this woman in the bonds of holy marriage, which is an honorable estate, instituted by God, when he said that a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be one flesh. It was confirmed by the words of our blessed Savior; hallowed by his presence at the marriage in Cana of Galilee; and compared by St. Paul to the mystical union between Christ and his Church. It ought not, therefore, to be entered into lightly or hastily, but reverently, discreetly, and in the fear of God.

These two persons have come to be joined into this holy estate. If any man [or woman], therefore, can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him [or her] now declare it, or else hereafter hold his [or her] peace.

Speaking to those who have come to be married, the minister shall say:

I charge you, each and both, as you shall answer to him before whom the secrets of all hearts are open, that if either of you know any reason why you may not lawfully be joined in marriage, declare it now. For be well assured that if any persons are joined together contrary to the Word of God, their marriage is not blessed of God nor is it lawful in his sight.

- c) Prayer

If no impediment appear, the minister may offer the following or some other prayer....

⁴ This declaration and the following parts of the "ORDER OF SERVICE FOR THE SOLEMNIZATION OF MARRIAGE" quoted in this section are adapted from Gerrit T. Vander Lugt, Ed., *The Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America together with The Psalter* (New York: The Board of Education, Reformed Church in America, 1968), pp. 119-124. A later edition has been published, and while I prefer parts of both over the other, the traditional wedding vows cannot be surpassed by the newer version; to keep it easier to use, the original is herein presented.

Let us pray.

Almighty and eternal God, giver of all good gifts, look with favor, we pray thee, on these thy servants who lift up their hearts to thee.⁵ Enable them to make their vows to one another in all sincerity, as in thy sight, and to be faithful hereafter in keeping them, to the glory of thy holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

d) Vows

The minister, before asking the questions, shall say:

Dearly Beloved, here what the Apostle Paul says: “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord,...as the Church is subject to Christ...Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:22,24,25). In the same spirit, I call on each of you to answer.

The minister, calling the man by his Christian name, shall say:

Do you, N....., take N....., before God and these witnesses to be your wedded wife? [The statement “before God and these witnesses” is highly significant. If the husband fails to do so, he has to answer to God and to all these witnesses of his public vows. Such accountability occurs throughout the whole Bible; see, e.g., Leviticus 19:17b; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:15; James 5:19-20; et al.]

The man shall answer:

I do.

Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health, and forsaking every other, keep to her only, as long as

⁵ The original Elizabethan expression of second person pronouns has been kept. Of course that may be changed to the contemporary “you,” if desired. Before doing so, it would be good to ask the couple which they prefer, i.e., which helps them most connect with God and sense his special honor. Aware of how much modernism has departed from tradition and resulted in significant downsides (sound reasons exist for many traditions), a considerable number of younger people are drawing more to the traditional and historic practices. Remembering the wisdom of my seminary professors, in my personal prayers I still use the Elizabethan tongue when speaking with God in prayer; it does help in retaining the clear awareness that God is very, very, very special. He is not only holy but holy, holy, holy (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8), while at the same time being all love. (1 John 4:8) However, with sensitivity to the current lack of teaching, and subsequent unawareness of many, that historically the male pronoun, when used without modification, is generic and includes females also, I have added “or her,” and related feminine pronouns, for clarification and respect for women and girls who also bear God’s image. At the same time, as an English major in my baccalaureate study, and in a life-long marriage to an English major, I choose to not violate standard English grammar, specifically the rule of parallel construction; thus, I avoid the awkward, confusing, and mistaken mixing of the first and third person (e.g., “their” when meaning he or she, his or her); communication is difficult enough without making up new rules that often confuse rather than clarify.

you both shall live? [To address a huge Biblical concern very prominent today, much more so than in the past, I have added this question to the vows: Will you obey the Biblical command to bring up any children God may give you in the training and instruction of the Lord? (Ephesians 6:4)]

I will.

The minister then, calling the woman by her Christian name, shall say:

Do you, N...., take N...., before God and these witnesses, to be your wedded husband? [Similarly as pertaining to her husband, the statement “before God and these witnesses” is highly significant for the wife. If she fails to do so, she has to answer to God and to all these witnesses of her public vows. Such accountability occurs throughout the whole Bible; see, e.g., Leviticus 19:17b; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:15; James 5:19-20; et al.]

The woman shall answer:

I do.

Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health, and forsaking every other, keep to him only, so long as you both shall live? [To address this huge Biblical concern very prominent today, much more so than in the past, I also add this question to her vows: Will you obey the Biblical command to bring up any children God may give you in the training and instruction of the Lord? (Ephesians 6:4)]

I will.

At this point the minister may ask [especially with younger couples]:

Who gives this woman to be married to this man?

The father, or guardian, of the woman may respond with “I do.” The minister shall then bid the man to take the right hand of the woman and to say after him:

I, N...., take you, N...., to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God’s holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge myself truly with all my heart.

Then they shall lose their hands; and the woman with her right hand taking the man by his right hand, shall likewise say after the minister:

I, N...., take you, N....., to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge myself truly with all my heart.

When a ring is used, the minister shall ask:

What token do you give of this your marriage vow?

The minister, having received the ring and given it to the man, shall bid him say [as he places the ring on her finger]:

This ring I give in token of the covenant made this day between us; in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Or,

With this ring I thee wed; in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

If the woman also gives a ring, she shall present it in the same manner.

e) Declaration

The minister shall now bid them join their right hands and declare:

For as much as you, N.... and N....., have covenanted together according to God's holy ordinance of marriage, and have confirmed the same by making solemn vows before God and this company and by joining hands (and by giving and receiving a ring), I pronounce you husband and wife; in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Hereafter the minister, addressing the congregation, shall say:

What therefore God has joined together, let no man [no one] put sunder. Amen.

[Here is a good place for a solo and for the lighting of a unity candle if desired.]

f) Scripture

[At this point, the liturgy calls for the reading of God's Word, which I have prefaced with these words: N.... and N...., let Christ be the center of your life together. For if He is, then no matter what obstacle you face or what difficulty you encounter, you will be victorious in His power. The love which you have just pledged to one another has its root in the love which St. Paul describes in his first letter to the Corinthians, the 13th chapter. Let this love be the foundation of your life together.]

The minister may use the following Scripture....

Here what the Word of God says concerning Christian love:

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **I Corinthians 13:4-7**

Beloved,...love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through him. **I John 4:7-9** [NASB]

[Here is an appropriate place for a message.]

g) Prayer

The minister, asking the man and woman to kneel, may use the following or another prayer.

Let us pray.

O faithful God, who keepest covenant and truth with them that [*or* those who] love thee, hear thou in heaven, thy dwelling place, the marriage vow which thy servants, N.... and N...., have vowed with thee. Grant to them the grace of thy good Spirit, that with all fidelity, they may observe and keep it, walking together in thy faith and fear, being led by the angel of thy presence and strengthened by thy hand, until they come to the inheritance of the saints in light through Jesus Christ our Lord, who has commanded us to pray, saying:

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BY THY NAME. THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD. AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS. AND LEAD US NOT INTO

TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL; FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOREVER. AMEN.

h) Benediction

The minister shall pronounce over them one of the following benedictions. [See also Appendix A. While pronouncing the benediction, it is good if the minister raises his or her right hand, or both hands, over the bride and groom and the whole assembly present to signify that God's blessing is, of course for the bride and groom especially, but also for all the others in Christ's special or common grace as well.]

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always. AMEN.

Or,

The Lord bless you and keep you:

The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. AMEN.

Or,

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. Amen.

- 2) Where will you include the above in a wedding worship service that contains the four main segments of worship: Gathering to God, Proclaiming God's Word, Responding to God's Word, and Receiving God's benedictory blessing in sending us back into the world for his service?
- a) What do the six principles suggest as to what to include and not include in the basic model for planning a wedding worship service? What guidelines do the principles offer as to where to place the specific elements of the wedding worship service?
- b) Notice that the traditional wedding ceremony contains the four main segments of worship and may be used as in the above service. If more is desired, including the use of the basic model for worship herein, since the wedding ceremony is the Christian couple's response to God's will pertaining to their commitment to him

and to each other, it would be good to include the traditional declaration and vows in the RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD section of the worship service.

Planning a Worship Service in Celebration of a Special Occasion

4. Are there any other special occasions in our church, or in our nation or culture, during which we should plan to hold a service to worship God, that would include the regular elements of a worship service, and in particular to thank him for his blessings and to seek his wisdom, counsel, guidance, and direction on such a special occasion? (See also the section below, "A Worship Service at the Time of a Public Crisis.")

In preparing a worship service involving the celebration or recognition of a specific occasion, such as a festive event in the life and work of the church, e.g., the church's anniversary, it is also important to begin by identifying the needs and conditions that will affect your planning. As a whole group, discuss the question: "What are the needs and circumstances this worship service will have to deal with?" Refer to the questions on the flipchart and record the answers as they are given. Add any of the following not mentioned. Ask the participants to add any other responses they come up with in their small groups when they give their group reports.

- a. Consider the felt and unmet needs of those who attend that the service should meet.
 - 1) Subjects: Assurance of God's presence, fellowship, joy.
 - 2) Resources: Bible, musicians, others?
 - a) Bible Reading
 - 1- Assurance of God's presence: Joshua 1:5; Haggai 1:13; Matthew 28:20.
 - 2- Fellowship: 1 John 1:5-7; Romans 12:3-18.
 - 3- Joy: 1 Kings 8:65-66; 2 Chronicles 30:23; Galatians 5:22.
 - b) If there are to be musicians, have you met with them and given them the Bible text(s) you will be presenting? Do you know, and have you approved, the music? Will any music planned be appropriate, including all verses of any with lyrics being consistent with God's Word, the Bible? Do not permit any unbiblical poetry, other readings, or music that is in any way inappropriate for worship.
- b. Identify the circumstances to be expected in planning a worship service in which this special occasion will be celebrated.
 - 1) Where will the service be held? In the Sanctuary? Fellowship Hall? In the open air?
 - 2) If the service is not in the sanctuary, will there be potential interferences, such as other people moving about, machinery or airport noise, unpleasant weather?

- 3) Are visitors invited and/or expected? What hospitality is required for them (e.g., space close to the front for those with special needs, such as those who are hard of hearing, who don't see well, who are in wheel chairs)?
 - 4) Are any special musical instruments and musicians needed?
 - 5) Are any special artifacts needed? (E.g., a display of pictures showing the church in earlier times in connection with the covenant body of Christ)
 - 6) Other circumstances?
- c. Now review your previous lessons and use those principles in your small group to prepare a worship service for the occasion you and your group have selected. Be sure to include the following items, which you may want to do again by division of labor.
- 1) What will you include in the four main segments of worship: Gathering to God, Proclaiming God's Word, Responding to God's Word, and Receiving God's benedictory blessing in sending us back into the world for his service?
 - 2) What subjects will you include in the prayers? (Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication?)
 - 3) What do the six principles suggest as to what to include and not include in the service?

A Funeral Service

5. In preparing a funeral service also it is important to begin by identifying the needs and conditions that will affect your planning. As a whole group discuss the question: "What are the needs and circumstances this worship service will have to deal with?" Refer to the questions on the flipchart and record the answers as they are given. Add any of the following not mentioned. Ask the participants to add any other responses they come up with in their small groups when they give their group reports.
 - a. Consider the needs of those who attend that the service should meet.
 - 1) Subjects: Comfort and assurance of hope in Jesus Christ, faith in Christ, fear of their own death, grief, guilt?
 - 2) Resources: Bible, funeral director and staff, pallbearers, musicians, others?
 - a) Bible Reading (Funerals are occasions where people most need to connect with God and hear his Word; include many Bible texts from both the Old and New Testaments.):
 - 1- Comfort and assurance of hope in Christ: Psalms 23; 27:1-6; 46:1-7, 10, 11; 62:1-2; Mark 16:1-7; John 6:40; 11:25-26; 14:1-6, 15-21, 25-27; 1 Corinthians 15:37-44, 53-58; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Colossians 1:13-22.

- 2- Faith in Jesus Christ: Psalm 27:1-6; John 14:1-6; Romans 10:9; 1 John 4:15; 5:1-5.
- 3- Fear of their own death and the death of loved ones: Psalms 23; 27; John 6:40; 14:1-6; Romans 8:31-39; 10:9; 1 Corinthians 15:37-44, 53-58.
- 4- Grief: Romans 8:31-39; 1 Corinthians 15:37-44, 53-58; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Be sure to tell the people that it is permissible to grieve. Many Christians mistakenly believe that they should not grieve, that doing so is a sign of weakness of faith or for other reasons. That thinking is not true; even Jesus grieved Lazarus' death while knowing He would raise Lazarus from the grave. (John 11:35) Paul told the Thessalonians, as recorded in the above passage, to not "grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope." This text assumes the need to grieve, but we Christians who have such great reason for hope, because of our relationship with Christ Jesus, should not act in our grief as those do who have no hope.
- 5- Guilt: Psalm 103:1-17; Romans 8:1; Colossians 1:13-22.

- b) If there is to be music, have you met with the musician(s) and given them the Bible text(s) you will be presenting, and have you approved, what he, she, or they will be singing? Is the music appropriate, including especially that the lyrics are consistent with God's Word, the Bible? Do not permit any unbiblical verses or music that is also in any other way inappropriate for worship in a Christian, Biblically-based, funeral service.
 - c) Liturgy
 - d) Pallbearers
- b. Identify the circumstances to be expected which will also affect the needs in planning a worship service on the occasion of a funeral.
 - 1) How old was the person who died? A child? A miscarried or stillborn baby? (Since life begins at conception, and the miscarried or stillborn baby bears the image of God, the child deserves burial, if the parents are unaware of this reality and the tiny baby's unformed but real body has not already been disposed of in the medical procedures practiced. The Roman Catholic Church has a place and procedure for respectfully caring for miscarried babies.) Was the decedent a young adult? Middle-aged? Elderly? (The age of the person and type of death impacts the congregation differently.)
 - 2) How the person died, e.g., naturally; prematurely: from a long-term illness, unexpectedly, violently, suicide? The cause(s) of death may not be necessary to mention and should not be mentioned in the service without permission of the deceased person's family, but it is important that you know the cause in order to plan the service most realistically and effectively.

- 3) Where will the funeral be held? In the church (preferably)? In a funeral home? Somewhere else?
- 4) Is this a funeral or a memorial service? Will the body be present or will it have been previously interred or cremated?
- 5) Are you or others planning a eulogy (pleasant words about the one who died spoken by one or more people who knew him or her)? If so, who will speak and when in the service? Do you, as the officiant, approve of this person and any other(s) the family wants to give a eulogy? Have you considered advising the family to not have spoken eulogies in the funeral worship service? Will what is said interrupt the dialogue between God and his people in this service or will it be a means of the people's response of thanksgiving to God for this person in reflecting on specific ways God blessed those in attendance through the one departed? If the latter, how do you know that will occur?

→ With historic Christian theology and the basic principle of worship theology that the worship service should focus on Jesus Christ; what he came to do, has done, and will do; and the Triune God, ***Lurge advising no spoken eulogies.*** Instead, any eulogistic comments should be printed in the back of the worship folder or other printed material for the funeral, listing highlights of what the deceased person did, emphasizing his or her good work that served the Lord.

→ Allowing friends and family of the departed person to stand up and say whatever they want, even if some counsel has been given, is to give them control of God's worship service, which is unwise. Family members often choose people to give a eulogy who do not do well; some are close to the family but not to God—they're not believers in Christ—and others who do believe are often immature, even very immature, spiritually and in other ways. Many, if not most eulogizers, are uncomfortable, for many reasons, e.g., sadness at the passing of their loved one, fear of speaking in public, longing to look good, and desire to please people (often more than God).

Such characteristics and motivations typically result in trying to use humor and be funny, which in a Christian worship service are spiritually immature attempts to relieve grief (and guilt) by transforming sadness into frivolity, rather than transforming sadness into joy by focusing on Christ, the only one who can truly, thoroughly, and most extensively make that transformation and lift the spirits of those in the worship service. I have observed many times when such eulogies even became embarrassing and have gone on and on without any control. When this huge mistake and other eulogies are made, a counterproductive distraction occurs and God's worship is changed into frivolity that neither honors God nor glorifies Christ, nor blesses the people with what they most need: lifting their spirits, comforting them, and assuring hope in Christ that is found nowhere else!

This is why my professors when I was a student in seminary strongly advised that eulogies not be spoken in funeral worship services. In well over half a century as an ordained pastor, I clearly see why they wisely took that stand. I have also

spoken to my family that I want no eulogies at all in my funeral service. None! My fervent wish and will is to *keep the focus of the whole worship service on our only Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, who is our only source of hope. This will be my last opportunity in this time on earth to facilitate a strong witness for Christ; please do not bypass or even diminish it! We have much to offer in a Christian worship service: hope for Christians is a realized expectation. For those in Christ Jesus, we know that his resurrection is the basis of our own resurrection and that we can be with him, indeed with the Triune God, and with all others in Christ for all eternity! (Romans 6:3-11; 1 Peter 1:3; 3:21) The funeral service is one of our most teachable moments: the people have come face-to-face with the starkest and most unavoidable reality of life; they're reminded of eternity; and they are there longing to hear a strong and lasting message of hope. We can give it to them! The only way their longing will be fulfilled is by hearing God's Word faithfully proclaimed together with the prayer that the Holy Spirit will help us all according to our need.*

- The Christian pastor officiating at the funeral has the authority, given by God and acknowledged by the church, through whom God has called the pastor to serve, and he or she is in charge of this worship service. You as the pastor *can and must* exercise your authority, for the sake of God, the church, and the grieving family and friends present. If, after counsel that explains the purpose of a Christian funeral worship service, people still want to eulogize the deceased, they should do it on their own after the worship service and after the committal service at the grave site. The brief committal service also proclaims comforting words from God's Word, focusing on the resurrection in Christ and life in the new heaven and new earth.
- *We only have a limited amount of time for these important worship services; we should not waste a tiny moment of it!* Everyone in attendance needs to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed: for comforting and strengthening the Christians present and for testifying to the Lord for unbelievers present in a witness to them for Christ Jesus. We must remember our calling, Who called us, and what he has called us to do. We must also remember that pleasing God, including accomplishing his purposes in and through us, must be our greatest desire, objective, and accomplishment.

We have people in attendance whom Christ has commanded us to reach for him. They've come to us; we haven't had to go search them out! Some of those people never attend any church events, much less Christian worship services. At this funeral service they are not only here but inwardly, if not outwardly, wanting to hear a basis for hope. When will we have a better, or even any other, opportunity for addressing their receptivity to the Gospel of Christ? This is no occasion to waste time with frivolity and other unwise, vain, and unsuccessful secular attempts to avoid reality and responsibility.

We do well to also remember, and use as our guide for planning funeral worship services, the six Biblical theological principles we examined in Lesson Four: especially emphasizing that the service honors God, assures forgiveness, glorifies

Christ, edifies worshipers, and offers hope for all who are grieving, contemplating the ultimate realities involved, concerned about their own and their loved ones' mortality and what lies ahead in the future.

- 6) Will there be music, and, if so, what kind of music will there be?
 - 7) Do I understand the common beliefs of the community, so that I can relate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to bring His message of hope in a way that will address and supersede any opposing religious and philosophical views in this context?
 - 8) What language should be used? Is translation needed?
 - 9) Did the deceased person have any comments, especially toward the end of his or her life here on earth, that should be mentioned?
 - 10) What was the role of the deceased in his or her family, church, and community, and how well did he or she function in these contexts? We don't use the funeral service to mention the person's faults (or successes, as discussed above), but we need to know this information, because we can't be unrealistic in what we say and do in this service.
 - 11) Will there be a reception for the family, friends, and others from the church and community who attend?
 - a) What food and drink will be needed?
 - b) Who will organize the reception?
 - 12) Other conditions?
- c. Review your previous lessons and use those principles in your small group to prepare a worship service on the occasion of a funeral. Be sure to include the following items, which you may want to do again by division of labor.
- 1) What will you include in the four main segments of worship: Gathering to God, Proclaiming God's Word, Responding to God's Word, and Receiving God's benedictory blessing in sending us back into the world for his service?
 - 2) What subjects will you include in the prayers? (Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication?)
 - 3) What do the six principles suggest as to what to include and not include in the service?
- d. In many churches a brief committal service is also held where the body is taken to be buried after the funeral service. Usually, the body is in a casket where it will be buried following the committal service.

In these times, due to funeral costs and other circumstances, many people are choosing cremation. As long as cremation is done without any reference to pagan religion, or an expression of a denial of the resurrection of the body, it is permissible in the church when rightly done. Both the traditional burial of the body, and the cremation of the body, have the same result: the return of the body to the ground. (Genesis 3:19) Cremation only accelerates the process. The casket or the urn in which the ashes of the cremated body have been placed, can be buried with the same committal service in the same cemetery plot. Some churches have a Columbarium wherein to place the urn of their loved ones.

The pastor or other officiant at the funeral and committal service should counsel the family against the increasingly popular idea of “scattering the ashes” of the deceased.⁶ Scattering the ashes does not sufficiently care for and treat with dignity and respect this body that has been created by, and borne the image of, God (Genesis 1:26-27) and was, if a believer, a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The Roman Catholic Church has a very thoughtful and correct policy whereby it prohibits the practice, and it also forbids keeping the ashes at home, dividing them among family members, and the various ways people try to turn a body’s ashes into mementoes (e.g., turning them into diamonds and tattoos or planting a tree with them). The church teaches that [the ashes must be stored in a sacred place](#), such as in a cemetery.⁷ This is a good policy to practice. Pastors should also advise against another related current practice being unwisely advocated: the disrespectful scattering of a person’s ashes to be treated as compost and fertilizer. This practice is unacceptably promoted with a deceptive motive, i.e., to care for the environment (no reference to God’s creation), but neither recognizing nor caring for this human body whom God created, who bore His image, and was a temple of the Holy Spirit if he or she were a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of the body will occur whatever is done to the body, but in the meantime the body should be treated with dignity.

A model of a typical order follows; it can be modified to fit a church’s custom or special circumstances.⁸

- 1) Readings from God’s Word, e.g., John 11:25-26; Isaiah 26:3; 2 Corinthians 5:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14.
- 2) The Apostle’s Creed (optional)
- 3) Committal statement
 - For example, “Now to the mercy of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three in one, we commend the soul of our departed loved one, [name], and

⁶ Dave /Viegut, “Thoughts to Consider: CREMATION,” *Loveland Reporter-Herald*, 2/10/21, p. 11A. The article also adds, “In the United States, cremation levels stood at 54 percent in 2019, and this figure is forecasted to grow to 79 percent by 2035. In the same issue, cf., Max Levy, “City-run cemeteries will run out of space soon.” P. 1A.

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/25/vatican-bans-catholics-cremation-ashes-loved-ones-home> (Accessed 01/26/21)

⁸ Adapted from Gerrit T. Vander Lugt, Ed., *The Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America together with The Psalter* (New York: The Board of Education, Reformed Church in America, 1968), pp. 146-149.

commit [his/her] body to the ground in the sure and certain hope of seeing [him/her] again in the resurrection to eternal life in the new heaven and new earth through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- 4) Prayer, concluding with the Lord’s Prayer.
 - 5) One or more verses of a hymn, sung a cappella, or with a stringed instrument.
 - 6) Benediction
- e. **In a Christian burial service of worship it is most important to not allow any of the old practices and ways of traditional pagan religions, or any quasi-religious organization such as the Masonic Lodge, that new or even older believers in Christ may still turn to in difficult times. Keep the focus on Jesus Christ and his Gospel, which is our only true hope and greatest help. (Deuteronomy 5:7-10; 2 Samuel 7:22; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5)**

A Worship Service at the Time of a Public Crisis

6. From time to time an event occurs that causes strong spiritual and emotional impacts and other needs upon a nation, community, or church. National events, such as war, a terrorist attack like 9/11, an epidemic, or an election; community occasions, such as a riot, natural disaster (e.g., tornado, record-setting wild fire, flooding, draught), a dispute and disruption in public service, e.g., a strike, or the shocking suicide of a public figure or a student; or church situations such as a financial downturn, the moral failure of a leader, or the calling of a new pastor, strongly impact a congregation emotionally and spiritually, including some of the great questions of life bursting forth from the core of their being, which only God can help and heal. At such times, when people are deeply moved, they want and need the help of the Lord, who is their, indeed our, only hope, and it is important that this concern be addressed in a service of worship. If the next regular service of worship on Sunday is near, the crisis can be addressed in that service. If it is earlier in the week, and a special worship service could be held, it should be.

In preparing a public crisis service it is also important to begin by identifying the needs and conditions that will affect your planning. As a whole group discuss the question: “What are the needs and circumstances this worship service will have to deal with?” Refer to the questions on the flipchart and record the answers as they are given. Add any of the following not mentioned. Ask the participants to add any other responses they come up with in their small groups when they give their group reports.

- a. Consider the felt and unfelt needs of the congregation that the service should meet.
 - 1) Subjects: anxiety, assurance of God’s sovereignty and the Lordship of Christ; God’s goodness; grief; hope in God, in Christ; prayer for and treatment of enemies; other?
 - 2) Resources: Bible, musicians, Africa Project preaching manual, others?

a) Bible Reading

- 1- Anxiety: Psalms 46; 77; Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:4-13.
- 2- Assurance of God's sovereignty and the Lordship of Christ: Job 42:2; Psalms 2; 27; 46; 73; Proverbs 19:21; 21:30-31; Isaiah 6:1-8; 9:2, 5-7; Daniel 4:34-35; John 16:33; Ephesians 1:19-23; Philippians 2:5-11; Revelation 1:4-8.
- 3- God's goodness: Psalm 100; 1 John 1:5-10.
- 4- Grief: Psalms 23; 42; 46:1-6, 10-11; 77; Revelation 20:11-21:4.
- 5- Hope in God, in Christ: Psalms 23; 42; 46; 121; Romans 5:1-5; 8:28-39; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Revelation 1:4-8; 20:11-21:4.
- 6- Prayer for and treatment of enemies: Matthew 5:44-45.

- b) If there is to be music, always valuable and helpful, have you met with the musician(s) and given them the Bible text(s) you will be presenting, and have you approved, the music he, she, or they have chosen? Is the music appropriate, including most importantly that the lyrics are consistent with God's Word, the Bible? Do not permit any unbiblical verses or music that is also in any other way inappropriate for worship in such a service.
 - c) Other resources?
- b. Identify the circumstances to be expected in planning a worship service on the occasion of such a crisis.
- 1) Where will the service be held? (Unless there are compelling reasons for holding it elsewhere, the service should be held in the church sanctuary; in times of crisis, people want to be in a sanctuary dedicated to God where they are used to meeting with him.)
 - 2) If the service is for a public figure, will political rivals be present? (As always in a worship service, and especially in a time of crisis, avoid partisan political issues in which the Bible is silent and on which true Christians can legitimately disagree.)
 - 3) What kind of music should be selected for the service?
 - 4) Other circumstances?
- c. Now review your previous lessons and use those principles in your small group to prepare a worship service for a public crisis. Be sure to include the following items, which you may want to do again by division of labor.
- 1) What will you include in the four main segments of worship: Gathering to God, Proclaiming God's Word, Responding to God's Word, and Receiving God's benedictory blessing in sending us back into the world for his service?

- 2) What subjects will you include in the prayers? (Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication?)
- 3) What do the six principles suggest as to what to include and not include in the service?

Planning an Evangelistic Worship Service

7. In preparing an evangelistic service it is also important to begin by identifying the conditions that will affect your planning. As a whole group discuss the question: “What are the needs and circumstances this worship service will have to deal with?” Refer to the questions on the flipchart and record the answers as they are given. Add any of the following not mentioned. Ask the participants to add any other responses they come up with in their small groups when they give their group reports.
 - a. Consider the felt and unfelt needs of attendees that the service should meet.
 - 1) Subjects: Anger, anxiety, crises, discouragement, family problems, forgiveness, God (who he is and what he is like), God’s righteousness, Jesus (who he is and what he is like), love, loneliness, meaning and purpose of life, money problems; salvation; wisdom.
 - 2) Resources: Bible, other church leaders, musicians, Africa Project or other preaching manual?
 - a) Bible Reading: Tell the groups that they do not need to look up all the following Biblical texts, even all of them in any one category, in their small groups. The additional texts are for future reference. Use selected ones, and others that come to mind, for the group report.
 - 1- Anger: Psalm 37; Proverbs 15:1-5, 18, 23; Matthew 5:38-48; 18:21-35; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Ephesians 4:25-28.
 - 2- Anxiety: Psalms 37:25-26; 103:1-18; 121; Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:4-13.
 - 3- Crises: Psalm 3; Isaiah 55:6-11; Philippians 4:4-13.
 - 4- Discouragement: Psalms 23; 42; John 14:1-4.
 - 5- Family problems: Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Malachi 3:5-6; Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1-10.
 - 6- Forgiveness: Psalm 130; Matthew 6:9-15; 18:21-35; Luke 15; Romans 7:15-25; 8:1; 1 John 1:5-10.
 - 7- God, who he is and what he is like: Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 61:1; Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 2:18; 1 John 4:7-5:5.

- 8- God's righteousness: Psalm 73; Luke 18:7-8; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2 Peter 3:1-13.
- 9- Jesus, who he is and what he is like: Matthew 1:21; 9:6; 16:16; John 1:1-18; 3:16; 10:30; 12:42-50; 14:6; 17:5; Acts 17:29-31; Romans 10:9; 14:7-12; Ephesians 1:18-23; Colossians 1:15-19; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-12; 2 Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 4:15; 9:27-28.
- 10- Love: John 13:34-35; 14:21; 15:9-17; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 John 4:7-21.
- 11- Loneliness: Psalms 23; 27, 91; 139:1-18; John 14:15-21; Acts 2:42-47; Romans 8:28-39; Hebrews 10:25.
- 12- Meaning and purpose of life: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15; John 10:10; Colossians 3:23-25; Ephesians 4.
- 13- Money problems: Ecclesiastes 5:10; Matthew 6:19-34; 1 Timothy 6:6-12; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.
- 14- Salvation: John 3:16; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:9-13.
- 15- Wisdom: Proverbs 8; 9:10-11; 15; 1 Corinthians 3:18-20; 2:1-13; Colossians 1:28-2:8.

- b) You need to have music, but have you met with and given the musicians the Scripture text(s) which should guide the selection of the music?
 - 1- Do you know, and have you approved, the music?
 - 2- Will the music planned be appropriate, including all verses of any with lyrics being consistent with God's Word, the Bible?
 - 3- Do not permit any unbiblical verses and/or music that are also in any other way inappropriate for this worship setting.
- b. Identify the circumstances and conditions to be expected in planning an evangelistic worship service.
 - 1) Where will the service be held?
 - a) Will the nonbelievers be more inclined to come to a neutral location in the community rather than the sanctuary of the church?
 - b) Will the service be indoors or outdoors? If outdoors, what provision needs to be made if the weather is unpleasant?
 - c) Will other churches be involved? If so, how? Are the theology and practice of these other churches consistent with the Word of God (disputable matters [Romans 14:1 ff.] notwithstanding)?

- 2) Who will the leaders of the service be?
 - 3) Who will be preaching? Is his or her theology consistent with the Bible and historic Christian theology? What subjects will be addressed? How will the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, be presented?
 - 4) How will the service be promoted in the community?
 - 5) What music should be included, and which musicians are needed?
 - 6) How will the invitation to accept Jesus Christ be offered? By whom? With whom will those meet who want to talk with someone, or make a commitment to Christ, and to pray?
 - 7) What follow-up steps should be taken to nurture the new believers? To which churches will new believers be referred for nurture in Christ that is consistent with God's Word? Is contact information for those churches available in a printed form with the other print resources that will be given to those who come to Christ at this evangelistic service?
 - 8) Other circumstances?
- c. Now review your previous lessons and use those principles in your small group to prepare an evangelistic worship service. Be sure to include the following items, which you may want to do again by division of labor.
- 1) What do you need to include, and how, in the four main segments of worship: Gathering to God, Proclaiming God's Word, Responding to God's Word, and Receiving God's benedictory blessing in sending us back into the world for his service?
 - 2) What subjects will you include in the prayers? (Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication?)
 - 3) What do the six principles suggest as to what to include and not include in the service? It would be wise to not include the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in an evangelistic worship service, one of the means of grace God has provided for his believers and which typically should be offered only after a period of instruction and to those who are members in good standing of a church congregation committed to, and abiding by, God's Word. We must not facilitate anyone eating and drinking judgment upon him or herself. (1 Corinthians 11:29) This concern far overrides the emotionally driven current desire by some to use the sacrament as an expression of hospitality. There are many other ways to offer loving, warm, caring, and welcoming hospitality that do not contain the dangers of the unwarranted use of the body and blood of the Lord. Traditionally, this practice has been called "fencing, or guarding, the Lord's Table," and has been done by most denominations throughout church history, primarily to protect the bread and the cup from misuse and to protect those who partake from severe spiritual harm. For more information, see the other lessons

in this manual pertaining to the Lord's Supper and my PowerPoint program, [*Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology*](#).

Small Group Planning of an Occasional Worship Service

8. When you have finished with the above basic information for each occasional service, ask the groups to use that subject matter and other resources to construct an order of service for the occasion they have selected. Ask again if there are any other special occasions in our church, nation, or culture during which we should plan to hold a service to worship God? (Refer to the above sections on "Planning a Worship Service in Celebration of a Special Occasion" and "A Worship Service at the Time of a Public Crisis.") For other resources suggest they be sure to include prayer and any of the members of their group who have led or participated in that type of service.
 - a. Before working as a small group, ask the participants to work independently for the first 10 minutes. Each person should answer the questions, mentally if not in writing, that have been raised regarding the service on which he or she is working, or on another idea for a worship service. Then he or she should plan an order of service to use as a basis for constructing one as a group. Tell the groups not to read all the Bible texts now.
 - Suggest that they consider using the model in Lesson Two and make any needed changes for the service they are planning.
 - b. Each group should appoint a recorder/reporter to write out its service on a flipchart page and report on that group's work to the whole group.
 - c. After 45 minutes ask the groups to reconvene as a whole and request that each reporter walk through the order of service his or her group planned.
 - d. When the recorder is finished presenting his or her group's service, invite the other members to make suggestions regarding any modifications they think would be good to make in any of the worship plans. You also should make any suggestions you observe that have not been mentioned after the other small groups offer their reflections.

During the discussion following each group's report, the other groups should critique the reporting group's work according to how well it incorporates the principles we've been studying in this workshop. Put the following on the flipchart as examples of some of the questions to raise for each group:

- 1) Does the model adequately deal with the expected circumstances of the type of worship service they have planned (e.g., for shut-ins, a funeral, a public crisis, and evangelism service)?
- 2) Is there evidence that the model adequately includes and meets the needs of those for whom the service has been planned?
- 3) Does the model service include the four main segments of worship in the dialogue between God and the worshipers? (Gathering to God, Proclaiming God's Word,

Responding to God's Word, and Receiving God's benedictory blessing in sending us back into the world for his service.)

- 4) Do the prayers cover the four main subjects of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication?
 - 5) Is the model consistent with the six principles?
 - 6) Should anything else be added that the group forgot to include?
 - 7) Are there any other modifications to the plan that should be made?
9. For any of the cognitive objectives you have not as yet observed the stated behavior, distribute file cards as needed, and ask the students to give you the stipulated responses. Be sure to ask them to sign their name on each card. Or, you can verbally ask the class, corporately in session or selected representative individuals, and/or those about whom you have a special concern, in or outside the class (especially outside and individually for those about whom you are concerned in order to avoid embarrassment and to facilitate their responses), to do the behaviors specified in the objectives. Review the instruction as needed, for any objectives that are not accomplished as you intend them to be. Doing so in class, will help those who need the remedial assistance and be a good memory refresher and reinforcer for those who have accomplished the objectives.

Action Plan Steps for Lesson Ten

10. Next say to the group, "For the remaining time in this session, continue to construct your Action Plans. First individually, then in your groups of four, reflect on these questions." Write them on the flipchart. Add any other questions that may be helpful.
 - a. Are there any elements of the worship services we developed in this lesson that I should include in the services I plan?
 - b. Should I make any other changes in our special worship services at home?
11. Up to now in this manual, all of our lessons have focused on what the Bible teaches about the corporate public worship of God. In the next lesson we'll examine what the Bible teaches about an individual's worship and family worship of God.
12. Offer a closing prayer for application of the lesson, including for the Lord's help for any class members who have a special worship service for which they soon need to plan.

Personal and Family Worship

Needs of the Learners:

1. Felt Needs:
 - a. See Lesson One section on felt needs.
 - b. Include here the needs the students identified in Lesson One that are applicable to the subjects in this lesson.
2. Unfelt Needs:

All the students need to learn the Biblical teaching on, and how to develop, explain, and implement, the following competencies:

 - a. How and why to develop a plan for their personal worship of God and to put it into practice on a regular basis.
 - b. How and why to develop a plan for their family worship of God and to put it into practice on a regular basis.
 - c. How and why to teach personal and family worship planning to others.

Goal: This lesson will help pastors, worship leaders, teachers and others to develop a plan for personal, and a plan for family, worship of the Triune God. Participants in this workshop will also be able to provide and explain the Biblical basis and structure of their plans. They will demonstrate how they are implementing those plans over time. At the conclusion of this session the participants will add to their specific Action Plan ways to implement these teachings of the Bible in their own churches.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson each participant will be able to do the following:

1. Identify and explain, verbally or on a 3 x 5 card, at least four components of his or her plan for personal worship of the Triune God, including all four parts of the ACTS model for prayer, and at least one passage of Scripture as the basis for his or her plan.
2. Identify and explain, verbally or on a 3 x 5 card, at least four components of his or her plan for family worship of the Triune God, including all four parts of the ACTS model for prayer, and at least one passage of Scripture as the basis for his or her plan.
3. Identify and explain, verbally or in writing, at least two reasons he or she will give to others as to why they need to have and implement each plan in his or her own life and with his or her family if applicable.
4. During this lesson, the teacher will observe only positive affective nonverbal feedback (e.g., interest, enthusiasm, excitement, and joy) and hear no complaints when identifying and explaining the meaning, significance, importance, and Biblical basis for developing and implementing a plan for personal, and a plan for family, worship of God, and how he or she will explain to others the importance of doing so in their lives.
5. By the end of the course, at least 75% of the class members will demonstrate their affective interest by asking at least one question or making at least one positive comment in class, or with the teacher at break times, either verbally or in writing.
6. By the end of this course, at least 75% of the class will report to the teacher, verbally or in writing, that they feel confident they have the ability, and are motivated, to plan personal and family worship for themselves and their family, and to help others do so.

7. Add to the Action Plan for the church(es) he or she is serving, at least one idea from this lesson that he or she wants to implement and at least one SMART step to do so.
8. Within three months of the end of this course, all the students will have begun to implement at least three elements of their Action Plan pertaining to this lesson within the congregation(s) they serve.

Materials Needed

1. The first three materials listed in Lesson One.
2. At least one 3 x 5 file card for each participant. These are always helpful for many purposes.

It will be most helpful if this lesson can be taught in a three-hour segment. However, if that much time is not available in one block, consider the following options: (1) Do some of the small group activities in the large group. (2) Teach the lesson in two two-hour segments, using the final hour of the second segment to allow the small groups more time to discuss and more time for the Action Plan.

Introduction

One night the Pharisee, Nicodemus, came to Jesus and asked the Lord some questions. “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things?” (John 3:10) Ask the group: “What does this text imply for us?”

Include this observation if it is not mentioned in the group discussion, or emphasize it again if it is mentioned: *One of the clear implications of this text is that those of us who are leaders of God’s people today must continually grow in our knowledge and understanding of God’s Word and in our ability to teach it to those we serve* (Ephesians 4:11-15; 2 Timothy 2:2). Of course we also need to grow in other ways as well, and throughout the history of the church, from Bible times to the present, God’s people have experienced that growth through daily reading *and studying* the Bible (today using a Biblically and theologically accurate* study Bible, such as the *NIV Study Bible*, and/or other Biblically and theologically accurate commentaries), through prayer, and through regular corporate worship and fellowship with other believers in Christ.

Many church leaders say, “But I’m so busy in my daily work for the church. I don’t have time to read the Bible and pray.” It is said that Martin Luther prayed at least two hours each day. When someone asked him how he could spend that much time in prayer and still do all his work, Luther reportedly replied, “I’m too busy not to pray; it’s the only way I can get everything done.”

* It is very important to help God’s people to be very careful of what resources they use. Many books, videos, and digital resources produced by publishing companies and on the Internet are not consistent with the Bible and historic Christian theology. Be sure to help them discern what is accurate and what is flawed, what is wheat and what is chaff, what is true and what is false. For help in this matter, see my PowerPoint programs, [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology](https://fromacorntoak12.com/) and [Bible Digest](https://seelyedward.academia.edu/) on my Websites at <https://fromacorntoak12.com/> or www.edwardseely.com and <https://seelyedward.academia.edu/>. All resources on these Websites are free with permission to use unchanged for Christian education worldwide.

Up to this time in this workshop, we've been focusing on corporate worship. In this session we turn to two other vital forms of worship through which God will bless us and his church to which he has called us: individual and family worship.

Biblical Guidelines for Individual Worship

1. Read a brief Bible passage related to today's lesson and offer prayer. Ask the participants to return to their groups of four in which they've been doing most of their work in this workshop. Ask them to share with one another in their groups their answers to the following questions. Write them on the flipchart.
 - a. Do you have a time of personal worship? If so, what do you do?
 - b. Assign one of the following Bible texts to each group. Ask the groups to read and discuss their passage and answer this question: What are implications of the text for our personal lives and in our leadership of the body of Christ? (If there are more texts than groups, first do one or more with the whole workshop as an example.)
 - 1) Psalm 19
 - 2) Psalm 63
 - 3) Psalm 119:9-16
 - 4) Psalm 119:97-105
 - 5) 2 Timothy 3:10-17
 - 6) James 3:1-12
 - c. Respond to any of the following questions your group hasn't dealt with in replying to the first question:
 - 1) When do you take time to pray and read and study the Bible?
 - 2) How do you study the Bible?
 - 3) Do you follow a specific plan?
 - 4) How do you keep from reading and studying only your favorite parts of the Bible (i.e., how do you expose yourself to all of God's Word)?
 - 5) Do you use any other resources to help you understand the Bible? If so, which ones?
 - d. Do you use any other devotional aids? If so, which ones?
 - e. Do you practice any of the other historic Christian spiritual disciplines (e.g., solitude, meditation, fasting)?

- f. How do you discipline yourself to engage in personal worship daily? What time of day do you choose for your daily personal worship? Explain that there are benefits for having such a time early in the day, by arising earlier than usual, and there are benefits for daily personal worship just prior to laying down to bed at the end of the day. Both and at other times are valuable for personal worship; each person needs to select that time which works best in his or her schedule, i.e., which times best allow him or her to read God's Word and pray with the least likelihood of distractions, e.g., cell phones, and other interruptions.
2. When everyone in the small groups has had the opportunity to reply to these questions, but after no more than 30 minutes, ask the groups to reconvene. Ask the recorder from each group to summarize what was said in his or her group in response to the questions. Start with a different group for each question. Record some of the most helpful ideas on the flipchart.
 3. Next, ask the participants to return to their small groups and construct a model for personal worship that they can use and teach others in their churches to use. Suggest they consider the following questions in their work:
 - a. What would a plan for personal worship look like using the same four-fold parts of worship we discussed previously: Gathering to God, Proclaiming God's Word, Responding to God's Word, and Receiving God's Benedictory Blessing in Sending us back into the world for his service? (Of course "gathering" and "proclaiming" imply more than one, but the underlying principle is the same in personal Biblical worship: Whenever we worship, we do so as part of and in a bond with the whole church militant [the church yet here on earth, militant referring to the spiritual warfare in which we're engaged (Ephesians 6:10-18)] and with the church triumphant [the church in heaven], answering God's call to come before him, hear his Word, respond in worship, and receive his benedictory sending forth into his service. Cf. Exodus 3:1-4:20)
 - b. How would you use the ACTS model of prayer that we studied in Lesson Five?
 - c. How can the six principles help us in our personal worship?
 4. When everyone in the small groups has had the opportunity to reply to these questions, but after no more than 15 minutes, ask the groups to reconvene. Ask the recorder from each group to summarize what was said in his or her group in response to the questions, presenting the model the group constructed. Add the following if not mentioned in the group reports.
 - a. It is good when beginning to offer prayer to take several moments to contemplate and acknowledge God, who he is and what he is like: his being our great heavenly Father; only begotten Son, Christ Jesus; and Holy Spirit, Three-in-One, who loves us, is listening to us, and is ready to communicate with us in a dialogue. Doing so reminds and connects us most meaningfully with the only true, real, authentic, and living God with whom we are communicating in prayer.
 - b. Point out how reminding ourselves of these principles in personal devotions and incorporating them into our lifestyles will promote our sanctification, and our people's sanctification, and also lead us all to life sustaining health, physically (e.g., from avoiding

sexually transmitted diseases) and spiritually (including helping us avoid turning back to past non-Christian religious practices).

5. The following is a model if any group or person would like to see another example. Also, consider adding anything from the model and the comments below that are not mentioned by the groups in their reports.
 - a. It is not intended that this model should be normative. Church leaders should feel free to add, omit, or otherwise change parts to modify it as they wish. For example, you may like to add the Nunc Dimittis just before the Benediction. (See Lesson Two.)
 - b. If singing is desired and no songbook, song sheets, hymnbook, cassette, CD, or Biblically acceptable Internet resources are accessible, the first or any other verses can simply be sung from memory. Those who are musical may even make up a song or hymn of their own, based on the Bible.
 - c. Of course if a commentary and/or devotional guide is not available, such a resource can be omitted.

GATHERING TO GOD

Call to Worship [See Appendix A.]

Psalm/Hymn/Song (Praise) [If desired]

Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Pardon [By memory or see Appendix A]

The Law and/or Summary of the Law [By memory or meditation/reflection]

PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD

Prayer for Illumination (to Understand and Obey God's Word)

Bible Reading

Commentary on the Word and/or Devotional Guide

Prayer for Blessing on the Word

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Confession of Faith [By acknowledgment or recitation]

Commitment to Obey God's Word

Psalm/Hymn/Song (Thanksgiving) [If desired]

General Prayers (Adoration, Thanksgiving, Supplication)

GOD'S SENDING OF US TO SERVE HIM

Benediction [By memory or see Appendix A]

Lives lived in service to God throughout the week (Romans 12:1-2)

- d. For the Bible reading part of personal worship, especially during the season of the church year called Ordinary Time, The Season after Pentecost, or Kingdomtide (focusing on the kingdom of God, as it is present and as it will be when Christ returns), it is more edifying

and sanctifying to focus on one book of the Bible at a time, instead of skipping around from place to place in the Bible. Read and meditate on a passage of any desired length, and then next time take the following passage and so on. Some people prefer to read through the Bible taking the books in order. Others like to read the New Testament together with the Old Testament, for example starting with Matthew 1 and Genesis 1, then Matthew 2 and Genesis 2, and so on through both testaments. If a chapter is too long to read at one time, a shorter passage can be read. Regularity, not length, and understanding and reflection/meditation, should be the primary principle regarding the amount of Scripture reading.

During the seasons of Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter, several publishing companies and organizations, that are committed to Biblical and theological accuracy, produce devotional guides which are helpful to learning and appreciating what God has done in Christ Jesus that the church has historically celebrated, and continues to do so, at these times of the year. These guides typically have a Bible verse or brief passage, together with a short commentary and a prayer, often all on one page—one page for each day of that season (e.g., Advent or Lent).

The lectionary is also a good source of devotional reading. If your church uses the lectionary as its basis for preaching throughout the year, offer to your parishioners your willingness to provide them with a copy, or the Website source where they can download a copy, of the lectionary for the year. It will help them come prepared for your weekly worship service, especially for the sermon.

- e. You'll notice the sacraments are not included in this use of the model. That is because the sacraments are signs and seals of membership in God's covenant with his people, and they are two of the three (the third being the proclamation of the Word) main means of grace by which God blesses his people, and are properly done in and with the presence of the church congregation, the visible manifestation of God's covenant, or, if necessary, remotely via digital livestream *at the same time the congregation is celebrating the Lord's Supper*, thus doing so with the covenant community and under the oversight and guidance of the pastor and elders whom God has called for such officiation.

Even when an ill parishioner receives the Lord's Supper, or under other extraordinary circumstances pertaining to the possibility of impending death a person is baptized at home or in some other location apart from a corporate worship service, the Baptism or celebration of the Lord's Supper, is appropriately administered by an ordained pastor or elder, who is called by God and represents the church. In an extremely rare case of where death is immanent and a pastor or elder cannot arrive on time, and a person wants to be baptized, a nonordained person may administer Baptism via any of the three modes, sprinkling, pouring, or total immersion, as long as the officiant administers the Baptism in the trinitarian manner, i.e., "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and in recognition of the presence of the Lord, who said, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20) The sacraments, as the rest of our Christian faith, are personal but not private, and always in connection with the Lord and his church, his very body. (1 Corinthians 12:27)

- f. In responding to God’s Word, it is important to include a statement of commitment to do his will, in particular in application to the passage from the Bible that has been read and discussed. Recall the practice of ancient Israel in their worship, e.g., Exodus 24:7; Joshua 24:14-27; Nehemiah 10:28-30 ff.; and the church, e.g., Matthew 28:20a; John 14:15, 21; Philippians 2:8, 12.
- g. Be sure to mention that individuals just beginning to engage in personal worship should not be concerned about the amount of time they think they should spend. If the above model seems daunting, they should do what they find joy in doing, even for only a few minutes at first. When they do so on a daily basis, they will find themselves gradually spending more time and may want to structure that time in a framework such as we’ve been studying in this lesson. A much less structured approach to begin with can consist of simply reading a passage from the Bible followed by prayer (using the ACTS model).

Biblical Principles for Family Worship

- 6. As leaders of God’s people, we have an additional responsibility to provide for our families.
 - a. In the whole group ask volunteers to read the following texts aloud, and then discuss what each says about why and how we are to care for our families.
 - 1) 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12-13
 - 2) Titus 1:6
 - 3) 1 Timothy 5:8
 - (Add, if it is not mentioned in the discussion, that we must provide for our families in all ways, with love and care for all their needs: spiritual and emotional as well as material.)
 - b. Explain the following: Be sure to take time for worship as a family. Pastors, elders, and other church leaders should take special note that dangers lurk in the lives of church leaders. Well-meaning pastors and other church leaders, who are trying to serve many people with schedules that are too busy, often mistakenly don’t attend to their own family’s needs. The results over time for not a few have been tragic: lack of communication, weakening of relationships, marital and family discord, infidelity, rebellion, divorce, and loss of faith, any and all of which display a negative and counterproductive model for church members, who look to their leaders for guidance.
 - 1) Solely humanly speaking, **your children and others in your family are the ones you have the greatest opportunity to reach and serve for the Lord.** Of course, with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27); however, God expects us to give special attention to our family, and God has built into them receptivity to what he has charged us to say. (Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:4-9; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 5:21-6:4; Colossians 3:12-21. I have included the context of these verses that provide God’s help for this receptivity.)

- a) The greatest tragedy would be to work hard to reach and serve many others for Christ and to lose one's own children and spouse.
 - b) Remember the six principles: If we fail our families and even lose them, we will not honor God, assure forgiveness, glorify Christ, edify worshipers, renew covenant obligations, or offer hope adequately.
- 2) The church looks to the pastor and other church leaders for a model for family life. Provide a good model! Don't provide a bad one.
- a) Keep a healthy balance; avoid the two extremes:
 - 1- Overindulgence: e.g., 1 Samuel 2:29
 - 2- Not giving enough attention (Could this be what occurred in Samuel's family? The Bible doesn't say why, but Samuel's two sons did not follow in his ways: 1 Samuel 8:1-5. See also 1 Timothy 5:8.)
 - b) Many church leaders don't like the idea that they are "living in a fishbowl" where church people and others are watching carefully how they and their family live. *However, the fishbowl concept is good.* It gives us an opportunity to teach by modeling family life according to the Bible, including how to manage difficult times. Nevertheless, do make sure to preserve time apart for your family to be together by yourselves, e.g., on days off and on vacation times together. Do not fail to establish those times, to announce them, to plan them, to take them, and to enjoy them.
7. Ask the question, "What do your families do in worship together?"
- a. After several have shared what they do for family worship, ask if any of your people still have any household idols or any other tribal gods from previous religious practices.
 - b. Ask, "What do you think should be done with those idols and gods?" What does the Bible say? Read, e.g., Exodus 20:3-6; Joshua 24:2, 14-27; 2 Kings 23:24-25.
8. Next ask, what else does the Bible say about how church leaders and all others in the church should live, including worship, in family relationships? Now request that the participants continue to work in their groups of four.
- a. Ask them to read Deuteronomy 6:4-7 and discuss these questions (write them on the flipchart):
 - 1) What does the text say for us to do?
 - 2) What is an example of at least one thing we can do in our daily lives for each of the five actions we are to take ([a] Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength; [b] talk about [these commandments, i.e., the 10 commandments in the preceding chapter and the others the Lord gave Moses] when you sit at home and [c] when you walk along the road, [d] when you lie down

- and [e] when you get up)? Ask them to spend the most time at this point in the discussion on the phrase, “when you sit at home,” specifically in family worship times?
- b. After 15 minutes ask the groups for their attention and for the recorders to report what they discussed.
 - 1) If it is not mentioned by any of the groups, explain that during daily times of family worship parents give themselves and their children the opportunity to develop the mind of Christ as God’s Word and Spirit shape their mentality and lifestyle. Doing so will form their orientation to life and, with the Holy Spirit’s help, decision-making when temptations arise. (See Ephesians 6:10-18) This practice is essential for their sanctification. Concentrate on God and his Word; shut off all cellphones and the TV.
 - 2) Conduct family worship in ways your family experiences joy, e.g., always discussing the practical, including helpful, implications of the Bible passages you are reading that pertaining to your daily lives, individually and as a family. Ask each member of the family what he or she would like to have included in the family’s prayer time. Pray for each family member’s specific needs. Each following day ask each person in the family how the Lord has been helping him or her deal with the challenges you have been asking Him to do for each of you. Continue to pray as needed for each person.
 - c. Now ask the small groups to develop a model for family worship. Also, add anything from the model and the comments below that are not mentioned by the groups in their reports. Suggest they consider the following thoughts.
 - 1) Propose mealtime as a preferred time to worship as a family. Prayers of thanksgiving can be offered before eating, and then more worship can follow the meal. When people eat together the opportunity for a special mental and emotional bonding is present. It is no accident that God chose a meal (Passover and the Lord’s Supper) as the basis for one of the sacraments he commanded us to observe.
 - It is good when beginning to offer prayer to take several moments to contemplate and acknowledge God, who he is and what he is like: his being our great heavenly Father; only begotten Son, Christ Jesus; and Holy Spirit, Three-in-One, who loves us, is listening to us, and is ready to communicate with us in a dialogue. Doing so reminds and connects us and our whole family most meaningfully with the only true, real, authentic, and living God with whom we are communicating in prayer.
 - 2) Suggest that they use the same four-fold parts of worship: Gathering to God, Proclaiming God’s Word, Responding to God’s Word, and Receiving God’s Benedictory Blessing in Sending us back into the world for his service.
 - 3) Use the six principles in constructing a plan for family worship as well. Point out how reminding ourselves of these principles in family devotions and incorporating them into our lifestyles will promote our sanctification and lead us to life-sustaining health, physically (e.g., from avoiding sexually transmitted diseases) and spiritually

(by avoiding any past practices from other religions and through the Holy Spirit using the Word in our minds and hearts).

- d. After 20 minutes ask the small groups to share their models of family worship with the large group.
 - 1) As the groups report, make any of the following points that are not mentioned by the reporters.
 - a) If singing is desired and no songbook, song sheets, hymnbook, sheet music, cassette, CD, or Biblically acceptable Internet resources are available, the first or any other verses can simply be sung from memory. Those who are musical may even make up a song or hymn of their own. Children and parents who play a musical instrument can accompany the singing. Family singing has many benefits including helping all grow spiritually and experience joy in the faith, and helping children learn the music they'll hear and be able to participate in at corporate worship. Many years from now these times of family worship will be cherished memories that will guide their future decisions and practices with their own families. (Proverbs 22:6)

Music is a very powerful and enjoyable way to learn, and retain, many of the great Biblical teachings. It is a very helpful, uplifting, inspiring, strengthening, and encouraging experience that combines the cognitive and affective dimensions of our mental processes and learning. Songbooks or hymnbooks are useful but not required; sing a cappella from memory if possible, even just one verse. Members of the family can help each other remember the words you and they have sung in worship with the church. Throughout the lives of each member of your family, these words, reinforced with their accompanying music, will remain in the depths of your souls. These profound truths resurface in times of need, including at the end of life. People who have had a stroke and certain other mental disorders, who are sometimes unable to speak, can still hear, and often they can sing and do so with obvious joy! Especially powerful are the theologically profound hymns they have sung from childhood. See Matthew 26:30, where Jesus sang a hymn with his disciples, even in those moments just before his greatest suffering. We see in his doing so the way for us to worship in song even while experiencing dreadful distress. Here we have another way to equip our children, our spouse, and ourselves for the challenges ahead.

- b) Consider the following regarding the Bible reading part of family worship:
 - 1- Select Bible passages according to the developmental needs of children who are present. When children are very young, use short stories. Other ideas:
 - a- Parents can suggest to children that they draw a picture of the story while they listen.

- b- Emphasize continually encouraging children, and all others present, to ask questions and to comment on the passage. Discuss any questions and comments.
 - c- After the passage has been read, occasionally the story can be reenacted with family members each taking the role of a character in the story.
 - d- Once in a while family members can take turns retelling one of their favorite Bible stories.
 - e- Ask the group for other suggestions and write them on the flipchart.
- 2- Again, it is good to focus on one book of the Bible at a time, instead of skipping around in the Bible. Read and discuss a passage of any desired length, and then next time take the following passage and so on.
- 3- Involve all ages in the different parts of family worship, such as in the prayers. Children will learn not only by watching adults pray, but also in taking turns praying, using both printed prayers and by praying out loud spontaneously. They'll also develop other very important values. Review Lesson Four.
- 2) The following is a model if any person or group would like to see an example before constructing their own or in addition to the others.
- a) It is not intended that this model should be normative. Church leaders should feel free to add, omit, or otherwise change parts to modify it as they wish. For example, the Nunc Dimittis may be desired just before the Benediction. (See Lesson Two.)
 - b) Use this model to draw attention to anything the groups don't mention, such as an opportunity to respond to God's Word with a statement of commitment to do his will, in particular in application to the passage from the Bible that has been read and discussed. As noted above, recall the practice of Old Testament Israel in their worship, e.g., Exodus 24:7; Joshua 24:14-27; Nehemiah 10:28-30 ff.
 - c) Of course if a commentary and/or devotional guide is not available, such a resource can be omitted, especially when children are very young.
 - d) Always be sure to include the opportunity for any family member to raise any questions or to make any comments on the Bible passage.

GATHERING TO GOD

Call to Worship [See Appendix A.]

Psalm/Hymn/Song (Praise)

Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Pardon [By memory or see Appendix A]

The Law and/or Summary of the Law [By memory or meditation/reflection]

PROCLAIMING GOD’S WORD

Prayer for Illumination (To understand and obey God’s Word)

Bible Reading

Commentary on the Word and/or Devotional Guide

Prayer for Blessing on the Word

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Confession of Faith [By acknowledgment or recitation]

Commitment to Obey God’s Word

Psalm/Hymn/Song (Thanksgiving) [If desired]

General Prayers (Adoration, Thanksgiving, Supplication)

GOD’S SENDING OF US TO SERVE HIM

Benediction [By memory or see Appendix A]

Lives lived in service to God throughout the week (Romans 12:1-2)

- e) You’ll notice the sacraments are not included in this use of the model. That is because the sacraments are signs and seals of membership in God’s covenant with his people, and they are two of the three (the third being the proclamation of the Word) main means of grace by which God blesses his people, and are properly done in and with the presence of the church congregation, the visible manifestation of God’s covenant, or, if necessary, remotely via digital livestream *at the same time the congregation is celebrating the Lord’s Supper*, thus doing so with the covenant community and under the oversight and guidance of the pastor and elders whom God has called for such officiation.

Even when an ill parishioner receives the Lord’s Supper, or under other extraordinary circumstances pertaining to the possibility of impending death a person is baptized at home or in some other location apart from a corporate worship service, the Baptism or celebration of the Lord’s Supper, is most appropriately administered by an ordained pastor or elder, who is called by God and represents the church. In the extremely rare case of where death is immanent and a pastor or elder cannot arrive on time, and a person wants to be baptized, a nonordained person may administer Baptism via any of the three modes, sprinkling, pouring, or total immersion, as long as the officiant administers the Baptism in the trinitarian manner, i.e., “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” and in recognition of the presence of the Lord, who said, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20) The sacraments, as the rest of our Christian faith, are personal but not private, and always in connection with the Lord and his church, his very body. (1 Corinthians 12:27)

- f) In responding to God’s Word, it is good to include a statement of commitment to do his will, in particular in application to the passage from the Bible that has been read and discussed. Recall the practice of ancient Israel in their worship, e.g., Exodus 24:7; Joshua 24:14-27; Nehemiah 10:28-30 ff.; and the church, e.g., Matthew 28:20a; John 14:15, 21; Philippians 2:8, 12.

Be sure to mention that those just beginning a plan for family worship should not be concerned about the amount of time they think they should spend. If the above model seems daunting, they should do what they find joy in doing, even if for only a few minutes at first. A much less structured approach can consist of simply reading a passage from the Bible followed by prayer (using the ACTS model). When they do so on a daily basis, they will find themselves gradually spending more time and may want to structure that time in a framework such as we’ve been studying in this lesson.

9. For any of the cognitive objectives you have not as yet observed the stated behavior, distribute file cards as needed, and ask the students to give you the stipulated responses. Be sure to ask them to sign their name on each card. Or, you can verbally ask the class, corporately in session or selected representative individuals, and/or those about whom you have a special concern, in or outside the class (especially outside and individually for those about whom you are concerned in order to avoid embarrassment and to facilitate their responses), to do the behaviors specified in the objectives. Review the instruction as needed, for any objectives that are not accomplished as you intend them to be. Doing so in class, will help those who need the remedial assistance and be a good memory refresher and reinforcer for those who have accomplished the objectives.

Action Plan Steps for Lesson Eleven

10. Say to the group, “For the remaining time in this session, continue to construct your Action Plans. First individually, then in your groups of four, reflect on these questions.” Write them on the flipchart. Add any other questions that may be helpful.
- a. What should I do to promote personal worship in the church(es) I serve?
 - b. What should I do to promote family worship in the church(es) I serve?
11. Offer a closing prayer for application of this lesson.

A SMART Model for a Back-Home Action Plan*

This lesson will present and explain an effective format for putting together a specific workable Action Plan for improved worship in the back-home church situation of each attendee.

A Good Action Plan Model

A good Action Plan model should have all of the characteristics that can be remembered under the word **SMART**. That is, its designated objectives and activities must be...

- S** = Specific
- M** = Measurable
- A** = Appropriate
- R** = Realistic
- T** = Time Bound

Here use pages 7-15 of the manual, *Planning and Organizing Workshops*, together with the Action Plan statements developed at the end of each lesson in this manual, as a simple way to teach how to begin to formulate a SMART Action Plan.

Formulating a SMART Outcome

Humanly speaking, probably the most important key to building and carrying out a good Action Plan is to **formulate a SMART objective or outcome**. (Note that in these Project Africa materials, the terms *objective* and *outcome* are used interchangeably, with both having the same meaning.)

Attempts to formulate a SMART objective or outcome are often not sufficiently specific, as for example: "I would like the young people in my church to worship better." Note that

Plan Your Work! Work Your Plan!

Previous workshop attendees have found that they could accomplish much more than they believed possible by making and carrying out **Action Plans** using the **SMART** format. Action Plans confirm implementation and accomplishment of objectives.

During the workshop, it's easy to make a commitment to give more attention to worship. But without a specific plan, it's also easy to lose your way during the busyness of your back-home ministry.

So the SMART Action Plan format is like a detailed road map; travel schedule; provision for the funds needed to cover transport, food, and lodging; and a written schedule of daily activities to fully achieve the objective you have for making a long trip to some distant place.

Neglecting to carefully "plan your work" and "work your plan" is something like saying: "Next week I'm going to North America. I don't yet have tickets; I don't know how much they will cost, what specific cities and people I plan to see, or even precisely what I intend to accomplish by making this trip. But nevertheless, I am fully committed to going to North America next week."

Such a broad-brush approach seems more than a bit silly, and it is not likely to produce anything other than wasted time, money, frustration, and disappointment. But it may not be too different from leaving this workshop fully committed to improve Biblical worship in your church back home, but with no detailed plan on precisely what you intend to accomplish, when and how you plan to do it, what you will need to make it occur, and when you will know if you have succeeded.

So, to make sure all of the time, energy, and money you have expended to attend this workshop isn't wasted, the rest of this workshop will help you to put together SMART Action Plans for your worship planning "back home."

* The material in this concluding session has been adapted from the SMART Action Planning model developed by Dennis Hoekstra. For further information, Chapter 3 (pp. 7-15) in the manual *Planning and Organizing Workshops* by Melvin D. Hugen is helpful for teaching the lessons on Action Planning.

“worship better” is not made specific and measurable in this general outcome statement. It is not possible to determine from the above outcome or objective statement how or when we will know whether “the young people in my church worship better.”

An activity to accomplish this might be: “I plan to increase the attendance of young people in our worship services by introducing the use of African instruments (e.g., adungu, arigiding, lukeme, sasi, tulimba), music (e.g., songs that are Biblical but in an African beat), and movements (e.g., clapping and dancing) into our worship services by the first Sunday of next January.” Notice in this example the specific and measurable elements that enable anyone to observe the accomplishment of the objective.

Using your Action Planning notes that you recorded at the end of each lesson on worship, identify objectives you want to accomplish in your home church. Use the following guide to construct and compare your SMART objective.

Is the objective or outcome as stated a fully SMART objective?

Question

Example

- **Is it Specific?** Yes. By February of next year the attendance of young people will increase by 25%.
- **Is it Measurable?** Yes. We’ll start taking attendance now and compare these figures with those next February.
- **Is it Appropriate?** Yes. Children are part of God’s covenant (Genesis 17:7); Jesus said “Let the children come to me” (Matthew 19:14); and the use of traditional instruments, music, and movements is consistent with the six principles.
- **Is it Realistic?** Yes. Many have been asking for this new thing, and I can identify at least three key opinion leaders who will be willing to consider this change and help us do it.
- **Is it Time Bound?** Yes. Progress will be measured weekly with a final evaluation at the end of six months.

Different levels of Action Plans

Different levels of Action Plans may be needed to make worship and other Project Africa topics sustainable. This subject is explained in chapter 5 (pp. 21-24) in the manual, *Planning and Organizing Workshops*.

1. As explained there, when workshop participants apply their Action Plans in their own congregation, these are **first-generation** workshops and Action Plans.
2. Nothing is as effective and powerful as making, carrying out, and publicizing an Action Plan that actually **accomplishes in the time designated the specified measurable worship improvements** within each workshop participant's own church congregation or parish.
3. When workshop participants, after successfully implementing Action Plans in their own congregations, teach evangelists or other congregations, these are **second-generation** workshops and Action Plans.
4. When second-generation participants teach other leaders in their congregations, these are **third-generation** workshops and Action Plans.

With this strategy, Project Africa results are spread and replicated among as many other churches, parishes, dioceses, and presbyteries as possible. As church leaders establish such effective programs, they in turn become teachers and models for others to follow.

Each One Teach One

The principle described above could be summarized as “each one teach one.”

1. Put the phrase on the flipchart.
2. Then have someone read 2 Timothy 2:1-2 to show the Biblical basis of this principle:

Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses **entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.**
3. However, note that second-generation teaching and Action Planning must nearly always come after first-generation workshop participants have successfully accomplished the objectives of their Action Plans among the membership of their own congregations.

This principle also comes from Scripture in the words of the same St. Paul who gave the “each one teach one” advice to Timothy. This is how Paul stated this **modeling** and **imitation** principle:

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:9)

Putting the Plan into Action

So now, let's go forward to put into practice by SMART Action Planning what we have learned so far in this workshop. Use the form on the following page as a guide. Ask each participant to reproduce the chart on newsprint and to complete at least one row in this session.

Illustrative examples of both first- and second-generation Action Plans from our Kenya Project Africa workshops are found in the Stewardship manual. Before beginning work on this form for the worship module, let's review those stewardship plans by "Pastor John" and "Pastor Francis."

Consider that while the **content** of these illustrative Action Plans focuses on stewardship, the **format** can be used effectively for plans focusing on worship, pastoral care, preaching, church education, and any other area of your ministry. In fact, "Pastor John's" first-generation plan for his own congregation specifically lists activities taken from Project Africa workshops on pastoral care and preaching. Such integration is essential for maintaining the Biblical basis and long-term success of all of your worship initiatives. Observe how much of this illustrative material also relates to matters of worship, as we've noted in the lessons.

The "Pastor Francis" example of a second-generation Action Plan also shows that for sustainability purposes, it is important to teach other church leaders. This quite simple Action Plan assumes that "Pastor Francis" has already been successful in achieving at least the same increases in giving in his own congregation.

Be sure to continue to pray as you formulate your objective and write out and implement your Action Plan. We should not allow our smallness of human vision to prevent God from doing great things. Prayer is the first and most important part of our work; God's involvement is essential to plan what he wants and to implement those plans.

All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the LORD.
Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. (Proverbs 16:2-3)

When you return home, continue to pray not only individually, but also with key leaders in your church. Bring together at least three or four of the opinion leaders you identified in Lesson Nine, after they've indicated their support of what you want to do, and ask them to meet with you in an ongoing series of sessions to discuss your plans and to pray with you. Such meetings will also provide these key leaders with more information and increase their enthusiasm for what you are trying to accomplish, thereby enabling them to be very helpful in the continuing process of implementing the new things you are planning.

Also, as a valuable discipline, give them a copy of your Action Plan, and ask them to serve as **accountability partners** who can help you be sure you implement it on the timetable to which you have committed yourself. Then, go forward in faith!

A Suggested Form for Producing an Action Plan

Using the preceding guidelines, write a SMART objective that you would like to accomplish in your church:

In the chart below identify at least one activity in each category that is needed to produce the desired outcome. Then pray and work to accomplish these activities.

A C T I V I T I E S	<u>What?</u> What do you want to do?	<u>Who?</u> Who will do it?	<u>When?</u> By what date will what is identified in column #1 be done?	<u>Where?</u> Where will the activity take place?	<u>How?</u> How do you plan to accomplish the activity? List resources that will be needed.		
					Material	Human	Financial
	1.						
	2.						
	3.						
	4.						
	5.						
	6.						
	Evaluation						

Appendix A: Worship in the Bible

Genesis 12:1-4

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. [GOD CALLS]

²"I will make you into a great nation

and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

and you will be a blessing.

³I will bless those who bless you,

and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you." [GOD BLESSES, BASIS OF THE COVENANT]

⁴So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. [RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD (IN FAITH AND OBEDIENCE)]

Exodus 4:29-31

Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, ³⁰and Aaron told them everything the LORD had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, ³¹and they believed. And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

[GATHERING TO GOD, PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD, GOD'S MERCY, PEOPLE'S GRATEFULLY RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD]

Exodus 23:15

"Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt.

"No one is to appear before me empty-handed. [OFFERING]

Exodus 24:1-18

Then he said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, ²but Moses alone is to approach the LORD; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him." [GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO WORSHIP]

³When Moses went and told the people all the LORD'S words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." ⁴Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. ⁶Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."

[GATHERING TO GOD (GOD'S CALL TO WORSHIP), BIBLE READING (PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD); NOTICE THE TITLE: THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT. ALSO, TESTAMENT (AS IN OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT) MEANS COVENANT. THE PEOPLE'S RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD, PROMISE OF OBEDIENCE, OFFERING CONFESSION OF FAITH]

⁸Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

[COVENANT RENEWAL; BASIS OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (CF. MATTHEW 26:27,28)]

⁹Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up ¹⁰and saw the God of Israel. GATHERING TO GOD Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself.

¹¹But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.

[COVENANT MEAL FORESHADOWING THE LORD'S SUPPER]

¹²The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction."

¹³Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. ¹⁴He said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them."

¹⁵When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, ¹⁶and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. ¹⁷To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. [GOD'S HOLINESS] ¹⁸Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Numbers 6:22-27

²² The LORD said to Moses,

²³ "Tell Aaron and his sons, "This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

²⁴ " ' "The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." '

²⁷ "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." [BENEDICTION]

Joshua 24:1,2,24

Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. [GATHERING TO GOD]

²Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods.

[PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD]

²⁴And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him."

[RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD, OBEDIENCE, SERVICE, CONFESSION OF FAITH]

1 Chronicles 16:28-29 (NASB)

²⁸ Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

²⁹ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come before Him; [OFFERING]

Worship the LORD in holy array.

1 Chronicles 16:34-36

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; [THANKSGIVING]
his love endures forever.

³⁵Cry out, "Save us, O God our Savior;
gather us and deliver us from the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name,
that we may glory in your praise."

³⁶Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.

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

Ezra 9:5-7

Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God ⁶and prayed:

"O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. ⁷From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great." [PRAYER OF CONFESSION]

Nehemiah 8:1-6

...all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.

²So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. ³He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

⁴Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.

⁵Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. ⁶Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

[GATHERING TO GOD, BIBLE READING (PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD), THE LAW, RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD]

Psalm 13:5-6

But I trust in your unfailing love; [GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE]
my heart rejoices in your salvation.

⁶I will sing to the LORD, [SINGING]
for he has been good to me.

Psalm 22:25-26

From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; [PRAISE]
before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows.

²⁶The poor will eat and be satisfied; [RESPONSE OF SERVICE]
they who seek the LORD will praise him--
may your hearts live forever!

Psalm 24:3-4

Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? [HOLINESS OF GOD]
Who may stand in his holy place?

⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart, [PRAYER OF CONFESSION]
who does not lift up his soul to an idol
or swear by what is false.

Psalm 29:1-11

Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

²Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness. [HOLINESS OF GOD, MYSTERY, AWE]

³The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.

⁴The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is majestic.

⁵The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
Sirion like a young wild ox.

⁷The voice of the LORD strikes
with flashes of lightning.

⁸The voice of the LORD shakes the desert;
the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

⁹The voice of the LORD twists the oaks
and strips the forests bare.

And in his temple all cry, "Glory!" [GOD'S HOLINESS, TRANSCENDENCE]

¹⁰The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD is enthroned as King forever.

¹¹The LORD gives strength to his people; [GOD'S IMMANENCE, PRESENCE]
the LORD blesses his people with peace.

Psalm 32:1-11

Blessed is he

whose transgressions are forgiven, [CONFESSION OF SIN]
whose sins are covered.

²Blessed is the man

whose sin the LORD does not count against him
and in whose spirit is no deceit.

³When I kept silent,

my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

⁴For day and night

your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.

⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you [PRAYER OF CONFESSION]

and did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, "I will confess

my transgressions to the LORD"--
and you forgave [ASSURANCE OF PARDON]
the guilt of my sin.

⁶Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you

while you may be found;
surely when the mighty waters rise,
they will not reach him.

⁷You are my hiding place;

you will protect me from trouble [DIALOGUE BETWEEN GOD AND MANKIND (WORSHIPERS;
and surround me with songs of deliverance. HERE HUMAN SPEAKS)]

⁸I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will counsel you and watch over you. [DIALOGUE BETWEEN GOD AND MANKIND

⁹Do not be like the horse or the mule, (WORSHIPERS; HERE GOD SPEAKS)]

which have no understanding
but must be controlled by bit and bridle
or they will not come to you.

¹⁰Many are the woes of the wicked,

but the LORD'S unfailing love
surrounds the man who trusts in him.

¹¹Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;

sing, all you who are upright in heart! [RESPONSE OF THANKSGIVING TO ASSURANCE OF
PARDON]

Psalm 34:7-10

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,
and he delivers them.

⁸Taste and see that the LORD is good;

blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

⁹Fear the LORD, you his saints,

for those who fear him lack nothing.

¹⁰The lions may grow weak and hungry,

but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. [GOD'S HOLINESS, PEOPLE'S RESPONSE,
OBEDIENCE AND FEAR OF DISOBEYING
GOD, PROFOUND AND LASTING RESPECT
OF GOD]

Psalm 42:1-5

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.

²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When can I go and meet with God?

³My tears have been my food [LAMENT]
day and night,
while men say to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"
⁴These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go with the multitude,
leading the procession to the house of God,
with shouts of joy and thanksgiving
among the festive throng.
⁵Why are you downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior...

Psalm 51:1-14

Have mercy on me, O God, [PRAYER OF CONFESSION]
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
²Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
³For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.
⁵Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
⁶Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.
⁷Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
⁸Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
⁹Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
¹¹Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.
¹⁴Save me from bloodguilt, O God,
the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

Psalm 66

Shout with joy to God, all the earth!
²Sing the glory of his name; [SONGS OF PRAISE]
make his praise glorious!
³Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!"

So great is your power
that your enemies cringe before you.

⁵Come and see what God has done,
how awesome his works in man's behalf!

[GATHERING TO GOD, PROCLAIMING GOD'S
MIGHTY ACTS IN HIS WORD]

⁶He turned the sea into dry land,
they passed through the waters on foot--
come, let us rejoice in him.

⁷He rules forever by his power,
his eyes watch the nations--
let not the rebellious rise up against him.

⁸Praise our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard;

⁹he has preserved our lives
and kept our feet from slipping.

¹³I will come to your temple with burnt offerings
and fulfill my vows to you--

[OFFERING]
[VOWS, COMMITMENT, RESPONSE]

¹⁴vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke
when I was in trouble.

¹⁸If I had cherished sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened;

¹⁹but God has surely listened
and heard my voice in prayer. [PRAYER]

²⁰Praise be to God,
who has not rejected my prayer
or withheld his love from me!

Psalm 73:1-17

Surely God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.

²But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.

³For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

⁴They have no struggles;
their bodies are healthy and strong.

⁵They are free from the burdens common to man;
they are not plagued by human ills.

⁶Therefore pride is their necklace;
they clothe themselves with violence.

⁷From their callous hearts comes iniquity;
the evil conceits of their minds know no limits.

⁸They scoff, and speak with malice;
in their arrogance they threaten oppression.

⁹Their mouths lay claim to heaven,
and their tongues take possession of the earth.

¹⁰Therefore their people turn to them
and drink up waters in abundance.

¹¹They say, "How can God know?
Does the Most High have knowledge?"

¹²This is what the wicked are like--
always carefree, they increase in wealth.

¹³Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure;
in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.

¹⁴All day long I have been plagued;

I have been punished every morning.
¹⁵If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
I would have betrayed your children.
¹⁶When I tried to understand all this,
it was oppressive to me
¹⁷till I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I understood their final destiny.

[EDIFICATION; GOD, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS: ANSWER TO THE
THEODICY QUESTION]

Psalm 77:1-20

I cried out to God for help;
I cried out to God to hear me.
²When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; [LAMENT]
at night I stretched out untiring hands
and my soul refused to be comforted.
³I remembered you, O God, and I groaned;
I mused, and my spirit grew faint.
⁴You kept my eyes from closing;
I was too troubled to speak.
⁵I thought about the former days,
the years of long ago;
⁶I remembered my songs in the night.
My heart mused and my spirit inquired:
⁷"Will the Lord reject forever?
Will he never show his favor again?
⁸Has his unfailing love vanished forever?
Has his promise failed for all time?
⁹Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"
¹⁰Then I thought, "To this I will appeal:
the years of the right hand of the Most High."
¹¹I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.
¹²I will meditate on all your works
and consider all your mighty deeds.
¹³Your ways, O God, are holy.
What god is so great as our God?
¹⁴You are the God who performs miracles;
you display your power among the peoples.
¹⁵With your mighty arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.
¹⁶The waters saw you, O God,
the waters saw you and writhed;
the very depths were convulsed.
¹⁷The clouds poured down water,
the skies resounded with thunder;
your arrows flashed back and forth.
¹⁸Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind,
your lightning lit up the world;
the earth trembled and quaked.
¹⁹Your path led through the sea,
your way through the mighty waters,
though your footprints were not seen.
²⁰You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Psalm 81:1-16

Sing for joy to God our strength; [SINGING]
shout aloud to the God of Jacob!

²Begin the music, strike the tambourine, [MUSIC WITH INSTRUMENTS]
play the melodious harp and lyre.

³Sound the ram's horn at the New Moon,
and when the moon is full, on the day of our Feast;

⁴this is a decree for Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob.

⁵He established it as a statute for Joseph
when he went out against Egypt,
where we heard a language we did not understand.

⁶He says, "I removed the burden from their shoulders;
their hands were set free from the basket.

⁷In your distress you called and I rescued you, [DIALOGUE WITH GOD IN WORSHIP
(SEE ALSO PSALMS 12, 95, 101.)]
I answered you out of a thundercloud;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

⁸"Hear, O my people, and I will warn you--
if you would but listen to me, O Israel!

⁹You shall have no foreign god among you;
you shall not bow down to an alien god.

¹⁰I am the LORD your God,
who brought you up out of Egypt.
Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

¹¹"But my people would not listen to me;
Israel would not submit to me.

¹²So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts
to follow their own devices.

¹³"If my people would but listen to me,
if Israel would follow my ways,

¹⁴how quickly would I subdue their enemies
and turn my hand against their foes!

¹⁵Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him,
and their punishment would last forever.

¹⁶But you would be fed with the finest of wheat;
with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

Psalm 86:1-15

Hear, O LORD, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.

²Guard my life, for I am devoted to you.
You are my God; save your servant
who trusts in you.

³Have mercy on me, O Lord,
for I call to you all day long.

⁴Bring joy to your servant,
for to you, O Lord,
I lift up my soul.

⁵You are forgiving and good, O Lord,
abounding in love to all who call to you.

⁶Hear my prayer, O LORD;
listen to my cry for mercy.

⁷In the day of my trouble I will call to you,
for you will answer me.

⁸Among the gods there is none like you, O Lord; [PRAYER OF ADORATION, PRAISE]

no deeds can compare with yours.

⁹All the nations you have made
will come and worship before you, O Lord;
they will bring glory to your name.

¹⁰For you are great and do marvelous deeds;
you alone are God.

¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD, [DESIRE TO HEAR GOD'S WORD]
and I will walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart,
that I may fear your name. [RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD]

¹²I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart;
I will glorify your name forever.

¹³For great is your love toward me;
you have delivered me from the depths of the grave.

¹⁴The arrogant are attacking me, O God;
a band of ruthless men seeks my life--
men without regard for you.

¹⁵But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, [WORDS OF ASSURANCE, PARDON]
slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

Psalm 95:1-11

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; [SINGING]
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

²Let us come before him with thanksgiving [PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (CF. PSALM 100)]
and extol him with music and song. [MUSIC]

³For the LORD is the great God, [PRAISE]
the great King above all gods.

⁴In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.

⁵The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.

⁶Come, let us bow down in worship, [CALL TO WORSHIP]
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;

⁷for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the desert,

⁹where your fathers tested and tried me,
though they had seen what I did. [DIALOGUE IN WORSHIP]

¹⁰For forty years I was angry with that generation;
I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they have not known my ways."

¹¹So I declared on oath in my anger,
"They shall never enter my rest."

Psalm 99:5

Exalt the LORD our God
and worship at his footstool;
he is holy. [HOLINESS OF GOD]

Psalm 99:9

Exalt the LORD our God
and worship at his holy mountain,

for the LORD our God is holy. [HOLINESS OF GOD]

Psalm 100:1-5

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

²Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs. [SONGS, SINGING]

³Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving [THANKSGIVING]
and his courts with praise;

give thanks to him and praise his name. [PRAISE]

⁵For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Psalm 101:1-8

I will sing of your love and justice; [RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD]
to you, O LORD, I will sing praise.

²I will be careful to lead a blameless life--
when will you come to me?

I will walk in my house
with blameless heart.

³I will set before my eyes
no vile thing.

The deeds of faithless men I hate; [DIALOGUE IN WORSHIP]
they will not cling to me.

⁴Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; [NEED TO BE CLEANSED BY GOD TO COME INTO
I will have nothing to do with evil. AND BE IN HIS PRESENCE]

⁵Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret,
him will I put to silence;
whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart,
him will I not endure.

⁶My eyes will be on the faithful in the land,
that they may dwell with me;
he whose walk is blameless
will minister to me.

⁷No one who practices deceit [SPECIAL NOTE TO GOD'S LEADERS AND
will dwell in my house; IMPORTANCE OF PREPARATION TO LEAD
no one who speaks falsely GOD'S PEOPLE, SPIRITUALLY AS WELL AS
will stand in my presence. IN PLANNING THE WORSHIP SERVICE]

⁸Every morning I will put to silence
all the wicked in the land;
I will cut off every evildoer
from the city of the LORD.

Psalm 105:1-10, 26-27, 40-45

Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; [PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING,
make known among the nations what he has done. GATHERING TO GOD]

²Sing to him, sing praise to him; SINGING (preceding proclamation)]
tell of all his wonderful acts. [PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD]

³Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

⁴Look to the LORD and his strength;
seek his face always.

⁵Remember the wonders he has done, [REMEMBER, COVENANT RENEWAL]

his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,
⁶O descendants of Abraham his servant,
 O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones.
⁷He is the LORD our God;
 his judgments are in all the earth.
⁸He remembers his covenant forever,
 the word he commanded, for a thousand generations,
⁹the covenant he made with Abraham,
 the oath he swore to Isaac.
¹⁰He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree,
 to Israel as an everlasting covenant:
²⁶He sent Moses his servant,
 and Aaron, whom he had chosen.
²⁷They performed his miraculous signs among them,
 his wonders in the land of Ham.
⁴⁰They asked, and he brought them quail
 and satisfied them with the bread of heaven.
⁴¹He opened the rock, and water gushed out;
 like a river it flowed in the desert.
⁴²For he remembered his holy promise
 given to his servant Abraham.
⁴³He brought out his people with rejoicing,
 his chosen ones with shouts of joy;
⁴⁴he gave them the lands of the nations,
 and they fell heir to what others had toiled for--
⁴⁵that they might keep his precepts [RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD, OBEDIENCE]
 and observe his laws.
 Praise the LORD.

Psalm 119:97, 105

Oh, how I love your law! [THE LAW OF GOD]
 I meditate on it all day long.
 Your word is a lamp to my feet
 and a light for my path.

Psalm 136:1-26

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

²Give thanks to the God of gods.

³Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

⁴to him who alone does great wonders,

⁵who by his understanding made the heavens,

⁶who spread out the earth upon the waters,

⁷who made the great lights--

⁸the sun to govern the day,

⁹the moon and stars to govern the night;

His love endures forever.

¹⁰to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt
¹¹and brought Israel out from among them
¹²with a mighty hand and outstretched arm;
¹³to him who divided the Red Sea asunder
¹⁴and brought Israel through the midst of it,
¹⁵but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea;

His love endures forever.

¹⁶to him who led his people through the desert,
¹⁷who struck down great kings,
¹⁸and killed mighty kings--
¹⁹Sihon king of the Amorites
²⁰and Og king of Bashan--
²¹and gave their land as an inheritance,
²²an inheritance to his servant Israel;

His love endures forever.

²³to the One who remembered us in our low estate
²⁴and freed us from our enemies,
²⁵and who gives food to every creature.

His love endures forever.

His love endures forever.

His love endures forever.

²⁶Give thanks to the God of heaven.

His love endures forever.

[A FAMILIAR AND FREQUENTLY SUNG PSALM IN ANCIENT ISRAEL CELEBRATING THE GOODNESS OF GOD POWERFULLY DEMONSTRATED IN HIS MIGHTY ACTS IN HISTORY TO SAVE HIS COVENANT PEOPLE; NOTICE THE DIALOGICAL AND ANTIPHONAL HYMN FORM STILL POPULAR TODAY; PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD; RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD IN THANKSGIVING]

Psalm 147:1

Praise the LORD.

How good it is to sing praises to our God, [SINGING PRAISE]
how pleasant and fitting to praise him!

Psalm 150:1-6

Praise the LORD.

Praise God in his sanctuary; [MUSIC OF PRAISE WITH INSTRUMENTS]
praise him in his mighty heavens.

²Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

³Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, [USE OF ALL THREE TYPES OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS]

praise him with the harp and lyre,
⁴praise him with tambourine and dancing,
praise him with the strings and flute,
⁵praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.
⁶Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD.

[IN GOD'S WORSHIP: WIND, STRING, AND PERCUSSION]

Isaiah 1:18

"Come now, let us reason together,"
says the LORD.
"Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow; [ASSURANCE OF PARDON]
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool.

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³And they were calling to one another:
"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; [GATHERING TO GOD, GOD'S HOLINESS,
the whole earth is full of his glory." [TRANSCENDENCE]
⁴At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.
⁵"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." [CONFESSION OF SIN]
⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.
⁷With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." [ASSURANCE OF PARDON]
⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"
And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" [PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD, RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD,
SENDING]

Jeremiah 31:31-34

"The time is coming," declares the LORD,
"when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah.
³²It will not be like the covenant
I made with their forefathers
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,"
declares the LORD.
³³"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel
after that time," declares the LORD.
"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts. [THE LAW OF GOD]
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
³⁴No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the LORD.

"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more." [ASSURANCE OF PARDON]

Lamentations 2:11-12

My eyes fail from weeping, [LAMENT (CORPORATE)]

I am in torment within,
my heart is poured out on the ground
because my people are destroyed,
because children and infants faint
in the streets of the city.

¹²They say to their mothers,
"Where is bread and wine?"
as they faint like wounded men
in the streets of the city,
as their lives ebb away
in their mothers' arms.

Lamentations 3:19-26

I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.

²⁰I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me. [LAMENT (PERSONAL)]

²¹Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:

²²Because of the LORD'S great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.

²³They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

²⁴I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; [PATIENCE, WAITING]
therefore I will wait for him."

²⁵The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;

²⁶it is good to wait quietly [QUIETNESS IN WORSHIP]
for the salvation of the LORD.

Micah 6:6-8

With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

⁸He has showed you, O man, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy [JUSTICE AND WORSHIP]
and to walk humbly with your God.

Matthew 5:23-26

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

²⁵"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

[JUSTICE AND WORSHIP]

Matthew 26:26-30

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

²⁷Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

³⁰When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. [SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER HYMN (of application) SINGING COVENANT RENEWAL]

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

[BIBLE (APOSTLES' TEACHING, PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD), LORD'S SUPPER, PRAYER, FELLOWSHIP (KOINONIA), SENSE OF (FILLED WITH) AWE (GODLY FEAR), RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD (SERVICE, GIVING TO THE POOR)]

Acts 13:13-15

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

¹⁴From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak."

[BIBLE READING (PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD), MESSAGE (SERMON, PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD)]

Acts 20:7

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.

[WORSHIP ON SUNDAY, CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER]

Acts 22:12-16

"A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.

¹⁴"Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

[BAPTISM AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH FORGIVENESS AND THE WASHING AWAY OF SINS]

Romans 15:13

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. [BENEDICTION]

1 Corinthians 11:17-33

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. ¹⁸In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. ²⁰When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, ²¹for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. ²²Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

²³For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

²⁷Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. ³²When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

³³So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other.

[SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER, INCLUDING SELF-EXAMINATION, CONFESSION, PROPER USES AND ITS PROCLAMATION OF JESUS' DEATH AND SECOND COMING (THE END TIMES), HOPE]

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

[WHILE THERE ARE OTHER IMPORTANT UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM, WE ONLY HAVE SPACE AND TIME TO HIGHLIGHT SOME HERE. THIS ONE TEACHES THE INCORPORATION OF THE ONE BAPTIZED INTO THE CHURCH, THE MANIFESTATION OF THE COVENANT.]

1 Corinthians 14:40

But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way. [NECESSITY OF PREPARATION AND ORDER]

2 Corinthians 13:14

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. [SENDING/BENEDICTION]

Ephesians 5:15-20

Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[SINGING (context of singing is application), PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING]

Colossians 2:9-12

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

[THIS PASSAGE LINKS THE OLD TESTAMENT SIGN AND SEAL (SACRAMENT) OF COVENANT MEMBERSHIP (CIRCUMCISION, Genesis 17:9-14) WITH A NEW TESTAMENT SIGN AND SEAL OF COVENANT MEMBERSHIP (BAPTISM), THE LATTER REPLACING THE FORMER.]

1 Timothy 2:1-10

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--²for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time. ⁷And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle--I am telling the truth, I am not lying--and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.

⁸I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

⁹I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

[PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION OR SUPPLICATION (INCLUDING GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES, OUR OWN AND OTHERS') AND THANKSGIVING, PEACE IN THE CHURCH, MODESTY IN DRESS]

Hebrews 13:20-21

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[SENDING/BENEDICTION]

1 John 1:5-10

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

[GOD'S CHARACTER: SINLESS, HOLY; OUR SIN AND NEED FOR FORGIVENESS IN CHRIST; ASSURANCE OF PARDON]

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

[PRAYER OF CONFESSION, ASSURANCE OF PARDON]

Revelation 5:6-14

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹And they sang a new song:

[GREEK: saying]

"You are worthy to take the scroll

and to open its seals,

because you were slain,

and with your blood you purchased men for God

from every tribe and language and people and nation.

¹⁰You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,

and they will reign on the earth."

¹¹Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹²In a loud voice they sang:

[GREEK: saying]

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,

to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength

and honor and glory and praise!"

¹³Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

[GREEK: saying]

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb [HOLINESS OF GOD, MYSTERY, AWE, HOPE]
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!"

¹⁴The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Appendix B: Worship Elements and Related Bible Texts

Lesson One Activity #3

<p>Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, (Ephesians 5:19)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">1</p>	<p>The Lord's Supper/Eucharist</p> <p style="text-align: right;">A</p>
<p>On the first day of the week we came together...Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. (Acts 20:7)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">2</p>	<p>Offering</p> <p style="text-align: right;">B</p>
<p>May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">3</p>	<p>Psalms/Hymns/Songs</p> <p style="text-align: right;">C</p>
<p>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">4</p>	<p>General Prayers</p> <p style="text-align: right;">D</p>
<p>"This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way...he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:24-25)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">5</p>	<p>Sermon/Message</p> <p style="text-align: right;">E</p>
<p>If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">6</p>	<p>Benediction</p> <p style="text-align: right;">F</p>

<p>Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. (Psalm 95:6-7)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">7</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Bible Reading</p> <p style="text-align: right;">G</p>
<p>In him you were also circumcised...with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. (Colossians 2:11-12)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">8</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Call to Worship</p> <p style="text-align: right;">H</p>
<p>Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long...Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. (Psalm 119:97-105; cf. 19:7-11)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">9</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Assurance of Pardon</p> <p style="text-align: right;">I</p>
<p>Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly.... He read it aloud from daybreak till noon.... And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. (Nehemiah 8:2-3)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">10</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Law and/or Summary of the Law</p> <p style="text-align: right;">J</p>
<p>I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--for kings and all those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">11</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Prayer of Confession</p> <p style="text-align: right;">K</p>
<p>No one is to appear before me empty-handed. (Exodus 23:15)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">12</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Confession of Faith</p> <p style="text-align: right;">L</p>
<p>Then he [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." (Exodus 24:7)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">13</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Baptism</p> <p style="text-align: right;">M</p>

Appendix C: Worship Elements, Related Bible Texts, and Meaning Statements

Lesson Two Activity #1

<p>Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, (Ephesians 5:19)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">1</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Lord's Supper/Eucharist</p> <p style="text-align: right;">A</p>	<p>A statement from the Bible that gives surety to those who have confessed their sins that they are forgiven and have peace with God because of their faith in Jesus Christ</p> <p style="text-align: right;">a</p>
<p>On the first day of the week we came together...Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. (Acts 20:7)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">2</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Offering</p> <p style="text-align: right;">B</p>	<p>Communication with God in which the congregation offers him their adoration, thanksgiving, and supplication for others and for themselves</p> <p style="text-align: right;">b</p>
<p>May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">3</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Psalms/Hymns/Songs</p> <p style="text-align: right;">C</p>	<p>Acknowledgment of our sin and guilt, asking forgiveness, resolving to obey, and admission of the need to do so in order to abide in the presence of God who is most holy</p> <p style="text-align: right;">c</p>
<p>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">4</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">General Prayers</p> <p style="text-align: right;">D</p>	<p>A statement from the Bible in which God promises to always be with his people and to bless them as he sends them into his service</p> <p style="text-align: right;">d</p>
<p>"This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way...he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:24-25)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">5</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Sermon/Message</p> <p style="text-align: right;">E</p>	<p>A response to the proclamation of God's Word in which the people of God express their common faith and union with fellow believers in Jesus Christ throughout the world</p> <p style="text-align: right;">e</p>

<p>If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">6</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Benediction</p> <p style="text-align: right;">F</p>	<p>A Bible text that guides us to live our lives in gratitude for God's forgiveness and for the assurance of our salvation in Jesus Christ</p> <p style="text-align: right;">f</p>
<p>Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. (Psalm 95:6-7)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">7</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Bible Reading</p> <p style="text-align: right;">G</p>	<p>A celebration involving the symbolic washing away of sin whereby the recipient receives a sign and seal of membership in God's covenant of grace and membership in the church, and the congregation commits to encouraging and supporting the recipient</p> <p style="text-align: right;">g</p>
<p>In him you were also circumcised...with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col. 2:11-12)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">8</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Call to Worship</p> <p style="text-align: right;">H</p>	<p>A gift of thanksgiving to God from the first fruits of our earnings, cheerfully given as a symbol of the other ways we should also give (e.g., our time, talents, and other treasures), for the nurture and extension of God's Kingdom, given in gratitude, not to earn merit</p> <p style="text-align: right;">h</p>
<p>Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long...Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. (Psalm 119:97-105; cf. 19:7-11)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">9</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Assurance of Pardon</p> <p style="text-align: right;">I</p>	<p>An explanation of the original meaning of a Bible passage and its application to the lives of believers today</p> <p style="text-align: right;">i</p>
<p>Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly.... He read it aloud from daybreak till noon.... And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. (Nehemiah 8:2-3)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">10</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Law and/or Summary of the Law</p> <p style="text-align: right;">J</p>	<p>Congregational singing with or without musical instruments</p> <p style="text-align: right;">j</p>

<p>I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--for kings and all those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">11</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Prayer of Confession</p> <p style="text-align: right;">K</p>	<p>A thankful remembering, celebration, and proclaiming of Jesus Christ's entire ministry, presence among us, and future Second Coming</p> <p style="text-align: right;">k</p>
<p>No one is to appear before me empty-handed. (Exodus 23:15)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">12</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Confession of Faith</p> <p style="text-align: right;">L</p>	<p>The hearing of God's Word from the Old and New Testaments</p> <p style="text-align: right;">l</p>
<p>Then he [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." (Exodus 24:7)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">13</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Baptism</p> <p style="text-align: right;">M</p>	<p>A passage from the Bible in which God's people hear God through one of his people call them to gather to him in worship*</p> <p style="text-align: right;">m</p>

* Some statements in the meaning boxes in the third column have been adapted from *The Worship Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: CRC Publications, 2004), specifically d (Benediction, p. 360), g (Baptism, pp. 274-277), and k (The Lord's Supper/Eucharist, p. 305).

Appendix D: A Checklist for Corporate Worship Planning and Preparation

NOTE: The following is a summary of the essential elements in public Christian worship. Use this checklist in three ways: (1) Read it before planning your service. (2) Read it while planning your service. (3) Use it after you finish planning to make sure all the items have been included in your service.

- Yes No Does the worship service include these six key Biblical teachings about God, his plan of salvation for us, and our response to him? Does the service as a whole:
- Yes No Honor God?
 - Yes No Assure forgiveness?
 - Yes No Glorify Christ? Yes No Does everything in the service point to Jesus Christ?
 - Yes No Edify worshipers?
 - Yes No Renew covenant obligations?
 - Yes No Offer hope?
- Yes No Does the worship service contain all four major sections of Biblical worship?
- Yes No Gathering to God?
 - Yes No Proclaiming God's Word?
 - Yes No Responding to God's Word?
 - Yes No Sending for God's Service?
- Yes No Is the dialogue between God and his people evident in the service?
- Yes No Are all four major sections clearly designated in the printed Order of Service?
- Yes No Are the following essential parts of worship included, and for each also a transition?
- Yes No Call to Worship (Transition: Yes No)
 - Yes No Psalm/Hymn/or Song of Praise (Transition: Yes No)
 - Yes No Prayer of Confession (Transition: Yes No)
 - Yes No Assurance of Pardon (Transition: Yes No)
 - Yes No The Law or Summary of the Law (Transition: Yes No)
 - Yes No Psalm/Hymn/or Song of Gratitude/Preparation for the Message (Transition: Yes No)
 - Yes No Prayer for Illumination (to Understand and Obey God's Word)
 - Yes No Bible Reading (Transition: Yes No)
 - Yes No Sermon/Message on the Bible Reading
 - Yes No Prayer for Blessing on the Word
 - Yes No Passing the Peace (Transition: Yes No)
 - Yes No Sacraments (Transition: Yes No)
 - Yes No Confession of Faith (Transition: Yes No)
 - Yes No Commitment to Obey God's Word (Transition: Yes No)
 - Yes No Offering (Transition: Yes No)

More...

- Yes No Doxology/Gloria Patri (Transition: Yes No)
- Yes No General Prayers (Transition: Yes No)
 - Yes No Use of first person plural?
- Yes No Prayers of Adoration
- Yes No Prayers of Thanksgiving
- Yes No Prayers of Supplication
 - Yes No For the world
 - Yes No For our country
 - Yes No For our state
 - Yes No For our local community
 - Yes No For the global church
(including those being persecuted)
 - Yes No For our church congregation
 - Yes No As a whole
 - Yes No Specific Individuals
- Yes No Psalm/Hymn/or Song for Application
- Yes No Nunc Dimittis
- Yes No Sending/Benediction (Transition: Yes No)
- Yes No Reminder of Living in service to God throughout the week
(Romans 12:1-2)

Yes No Does the service contain elements that will sufficiently *edify* [**Head**] the worshipers, *inspire* [**Heart**] them, and lead them to *respond* [**Hands**] in service for God?
 + Specifically, what do you (i.e., what according to the Bible Reading, does the Lord) want the people to do differently from now on as a result of participating in this worship service?

- Yes No Does the service contain elements that help the people sense they are in the presence of God who is most holy as well as all love?
- Yes No Is all art work consistent with the Bible?
- Yes No Are there visual objects that distract from the central elements of worship?
 - Yes No Works of art?
 - Yes No Furniture?
 - Yes No Other things (e.g., flags)?
 - Yes No Dress of the leaders, musicians, or others? (Cf. 1 Timothy 2:9)
- Yes No Is there any reference to the current season of the church year (e.g., Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost)?
- Yes No Will all aspects of this worship service be hospitable (help all people feel welcome, cared for, and loved with needs met) in particular for the following?
 - Yes No For children?
 - Yes No For teenagers?
 - Yes No For those hard of hearing?
 - Yes No For those who can't see well?

More...

- Yes No For those in wheelchairs?
- Yes No For those with other disabilities?
- Yes No For those who are unfamiliar with our (or any) church?
- Yes No Are the musical messages appropriate?
- Yes No Are all lyrics Biblical?
- Yes No Are all lyrics related to their section of the service?
- Yes No Are musical selections mostly in the first person plural?
- Yes No Is the music beautiful? (See Lesson Three and Appendix F.)
- Yes No Is the music too loud?
- Yes No Is the music too hard to hear?
- Yes No Is every part of the service consistent with the six principles and the rest of the Bible?
- Yes No Is programming for children and teenagers held at a time different from the worship service(s) to permit them to attend worship with the rest of the covenant community in this place?
- Yes No Have we taken all the steps possible to facilitate worshipers' physical safety? (See also the checklist in Appendix G.)

Appendix E: Four Sections and Six Components of God's Worship in the Bible

Nehemiah 8:1-18

Gathering to God

¹ all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.

Hearing God's Word Proclaimed

² So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand.¹

³ He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

⁴ Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.

⁵ Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them;² and as he opened it, the people all stood up.³

⁶ Ezra praised the LORD, the great God;⁴ and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.⁵

⁷ The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there.

⁸ They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning⁶ so that the people could understand what was being read.

¹ Intergenerational worship: Notice that children are also present.

² Architectural implications: Keep in mind it is difficult for people in the back to see when the speaker is standing on the same level as the congregation.

³ Standing is a sign of respect for God. Many congregations still stand for the reading of God's Word, and some Eastern Orthodox churches stand for the whole worship service, even a multihour service I attended in St. Petersburg (then Leningrad), Russia.

⁴ Praise occurs in all sections of worship, here in the hearing section. Here we also have a good example of the dialogue within the dialogue: the four main sections/aspects of the worship dialogue and the back and forth communication between God and his people within each.

⁵ Dialogue in worship includes God and people responding within the four main sections of corporate worship.

⁶ Edification: Sermon— interpretation and application of God's Word. The Bible is the basis for the sermon and should be for children's sermons as well, but note that there is no children's sermon here; the children were included and also understood in a developmental manner.

Responding to God

⁹ Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

Receiving God's Sending for His Service

¹⁰ Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

¹¹ The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve."

¹² Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.⁷

¹³ On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law.

¹⁴ They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month

¹⁵ and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: "Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make booths"—as it is written.

¹⁶ So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves booths on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim.

¹⁷ The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.

¹⁸ Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

Nehemiah 9:1-38

Gathering to God

¹ On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads.

² Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins⁸ and the wickedness of their fathers.

Hearing God's Word Proclaimed

³ They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the LORD their God.

⁷ Joy in worship is linked to edification through God's Word.

⁸ Confession is an essential part of worshipping God.

⁴ Standing on the stairs were the Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Kenani—who called with loud voices to the LORD their God.

⁵ And the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah--said: "Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting." "Blessed be your glorious name,⁹ and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise.

⁶ You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

⁷ "You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham.

⁸ You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous.

⁹ "You saw the suffering of our forefathers in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea.

¹⁰ You sent miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them.¹⁰ You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day.

¹¹ You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters.

¹² By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take.

¹³ "You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good.

¹⁴ You made known to them your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees and laws through your servant Moses.

¹⁵ In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them.

¹⁶ "But they, our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands.

¹⁷ They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them,

¹⁸ even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, 'This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,' or when they committed awful blasphemies.

¹⁹ "Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert. By day the pillar of cloud did not cease to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take.

²⁰ You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their

⁹ A prayer of adoration is an important part of worshiping God. (See all of vs. 5-6 together.)

¹⁰ Here in verses 7-10, we see another of the many references in God's Word, that the religion of the Bible, contrary to all other religions of the world, is connected to history portraying God working in and through documented events and people through the centuries, especially all in and through and focused on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All other religions are thoughts and fabrications of a sinful person's mind, e.g., Buddha, Mohammed, Joseph Smith.

mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst.

²¹ For forty years you sustained them in the desert; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen.

²² "You gave them kingdoms and nations, allotting to them even the remotest frontiers. They took over the country of Sihon king of Heshbon and the country of Og king of Bashan.

²³ You made their sons as numerous as the stars in the sky, and you brought them into the land that you told their fathers to enter and possess.

²⁴ Their sons went in and took possession of the land. You subdued before them the Canaanites, who lived in the land; you handed the Canaanites over to them, along with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with them as they pleased.

²⁵ They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness.

²⁶ "But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs. They killed your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies.

²⁷ So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.

²⁸ "But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time.

²⁹ "You warned them to return to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, by which a man will live if he obeys them. Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen.

³⁰ For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples.

³¹ But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

³² "Now therefore, O our God, the great, mighty and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes—the hardship that has come upon us, upon our kings and leaders, upon our priests and prophets, upon our fathers and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today.

³³ In all that has happened to us, you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong.

³⁴ Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the warnings you gave them.

³⁵ Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways.

³⁶ "But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces.

³⁷ Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.

Responding to God

³⁸ "In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement,¹¹ putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it."

Nehemiah 10:1-39

¹ Those who sealed it were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah. Zedekiah,

² Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,

³ Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah,

⁴ Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch,

⁵ Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,

⁶ Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,

⁷ Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,

⁸ Maaziah, Bilgai and Shemaiah. These were the priests.

⁹ The Levites: Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel,

¹⁰ and their associates: Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiiah, Hanan,

¹¹ Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,

¹² Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,

¹³ Hodiah, Bani and Beninu.

¹⁴ The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani,

¹⁵ Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,

¹⁶ Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,

¹⁷ Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,

¹⁸ Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai,

¹⁹ Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,

²⁰ Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,

²¹ Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,

²² Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah,

²³ Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub,

²⁴ Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,

²⁵ Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,

²⁶ Ahiah, Hanan, Anan,

²⁷ Malluch, Harim and Baanah.

²⁸ "The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand—¹²

²⁹ all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.¹³

³⁰ "We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.

³¹ "When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not

¹¹ The worship service involves a renewing of the covenant. See Lesson One. Worship involves commitment to obey God, his Word and his will. In worship we renew our covenant obligations with God.

¹² Here is another indication that worship in the Bible is intergenerational.

¹³ A pledge to obey is an essential part of worshipping God.

buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts.

³² "We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give¹⁴ a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God:

³³ for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, New Moon festivals and appointed feasts; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God.

³⁴ "We--the priests, the Levites and the people--have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law.

³⁵ "We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree.

³⁶ "As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there.

³⁷ "Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our [grain] offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work.

³⁸ A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury.

³⁹ The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and oil to the storerooms where the articles for the sanctuary are kept and where the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the singers stay. "We will not neglect the house of our God."

Six Components of God's Worship

As we examine carefully these accounts of worship recorded in Nehemiah 8-10 we observe elements of six major motifs (major themes of Scripture) that recur throughout the Bible. Very significantly these six themes are what theologians refer to as the six loci of historic Christian (systematic) theology. While denominational doctrinal distinctives vary within some of these loci, historically these are the basic six categories, and generally in this order, that have characterized Christian theology in the global church across the centuries. Even denominations that typically avoid creedal and confessional commitments tend to use these themes in their explanations of the basic message of the Bible, i.e. of God's plan of redemption for his creation and our role in it.

Since these themes are so prominent in God's Word, it is appropriate to employ them as principles to guide the planning of his worship. They thus find inclusion not only in the edification dimension of worship (e.g., the sermon) but in the four main sections and within them the subsections of the worship service. In fact designating the sections in the order of service is

¹⁴ An offering is an important part of worshiping God, whereby his people respond to his grace with gratitude, here tangibly shown by a significant (a tithe) expression of heartfelt thanksgiving to him. As the whole passage shows in vss. 32-39, the offering is *an offering, never a collection*, and it is always given to God for his work, the accomplishment of his purposes. It is also an expression of our renewing the covenant in our worship of God.

edifying in itself as worshipers see that they are engaging in a dialogue with God, which understanding greatly enhances their understanding of the meaning of what they are doing.

The following chart is designed to assist in depicting the above observations from Nehemiah 8-10. Please keep in mind that as with all graphic representations, the chart identifies only key aspects of the topics. For example, the verses in 10:33-36, while mentioning aspects of redemption, do not give the whole teaching of God's Word on redemption, for their main focus is on the offering.

Further, while the Old Testament is a rich repository of worship basics, we must also remember that it is in the preliminary part of God's progressive revelation of his unfolding plan of redemption that focuses on and culminates in Christ Jesus. Some aspects of his plan are rudimentary in the Old Testament, e.g., the eschatological hope, which while present, is only a glimmer and that dimly perceived; it is typically perceived in the here and now. (Cf. 10:33) Nevertheless, the main subject of our worship, Christ, including the Triune God, is present in the Old Testament (e.g., Isaiah 53, 61:1). The whole Bible is our authority, and the New Testament assumes the Old, which is why it does not repeat most of what is in the Old Testament.

However, we always must be careful in interpreting the Old Testament regarding the transfer of worship practices to church worship since the New Testament. Since OT practices were largely preparatory for and pointing to the coming of Jesus Christ, some shouldn't be done in our worship. For a clear example, see the setting aside of the OT sacrificial system with the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus the Christ. (Hebrews 10)

With regard to the fourth column, "Worship *Section/Subsection Examples*," please keep in mind that the items listed are illustrative not exhaustive; they are a limited number of examples. The New Testament permits flexibility and a liturgical freedom limited only by Christ-centeredness conducting our worship of God "in a fitting and orderly way." (1 Corinthians 14:40) What other elements of worship should be added in each of the six boxes?

Systematic theology is a grouping of Biblical texts by key themes, i.e., a study of what the Bible teaches about those subjects and arranged in a way that explains their interconnectedness, thus providing an overview of God's historical plan of salvation and the main points in his Word. Inclusion of the six main themes in historic Christian theology facilitates meaningful worship. For a further explanation of systematic theology and its relationship with Christian worship, see [*Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God's Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity*](#), a PowerPoint presentation by Rev. Edward D. Seely, Th.M., Ph.D.

Subject	Text	Worship Principle	Worship Section/ Subsection Examples	Corresponding Component of Historic Christian Theology
God is honored	8:6a; 9:5-15, 17-25, 27, 28, 33-35	Honor God	<i>Gathering:</i> Scripture; Psalms/ Hymns/ Songs of Praise	Theology (Study of God)
The people's disobedience and forgiveness	8:9-11; 9:16-17, 26-27, 28, 29, 30, 33-35	Assure Forgiveness	<i>Gathering:</i> Confession & Assurance of Pardon	Anthropology (Study of Mankind)
Redemption	8:3, 12; 10:33-36 (See also Exodus 13:13.) Hebrews 9:11-28.	Glorify Christ	<i>Hearing God's Word:</i> Sermon; Psalms/ Hymns/ Songs; Sacraments <i>Responding to God:</i> Commitment to Obey (Cf. Matthew 7:21; John 15:8)	Christology (Study of Christ)
Edification of the people	8:3-9, 12; 9:3, 20, 26-27, 30 (In class read vss. 20-30.)	Edify Worshipers	<i>Hearing God's Word:</i> Sermon; Sacraments	Soteriology/ Pneumatology/ Application of Redemption (Study of salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit)
The people's response	8:6b; 9:38-10:39 (People renew their covenant obligations; pledge to obey. Cf. Exodus 24:4-8; Joshua 24:24-27); 10:32-39	Renew Covenant Obligations	<i>Responding to God:</i> Creed; Offering; Commitment to Obey; Psalms/ Hymns/ Songs of Application	Ecclesiology (Study of the Church)
The hope that is offered	8:12; 9:5-7, 17, 27-31	Offer Hope	<i>Gathering</i> (Scripture); <i>Hearing</i> (Scripture; Sermon; Psalms/ Hymns/Songs); <i>Sending</i> (Scripture)	Eschatology (Study of the Last Things)

Edward D. Seely 10/18/11; 05/27/15

Appendix F: Principles for Determining What Is Beautiful in and for God's Worship

Worship planners face the weekly challenge of including elements in the sanctuary and in the liturgy, the order of service, that are perceived as aesthetically pleasing or beautiful to the worshipers. In so doing these elements will contribute toward the dialogue between God and his people and not hinder that communication. But what is beautiful?

In Exodus we read God telling Moses, “Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honor [rendered beauty in KJV, NASB.¹].” (28:2) In verse three, we read that God has given to the skilled men, who will be making these garments that will produce such beauty, the wisdom to do so. Later in that chapter God says, “Make tunics, sashes and headbands for Aaron’s sons, to give them dignity and honor [the same Hebrew word as in verse two, rendered beauty in KJV, NASB.]” (28:40)

We obtain a clue as to what constitutes beauty in the Bible by linking the words translated “beauty” or “beautiful.” For example, we see the following as being described as having beauty or being beautiful: baby Moses (Exodus 2:2); Aaron’s garments (Exodus 28:2); priestly garments for Aaron’s sons (Exodus 28:40); foliage of trees (Leviticus 23:40); Israel’s tents (Numbers 24:5); a robe (Joshua 7:21); David’s eyes (1 Samuel 16:12); Absalom, who was without blemish from the top of his head to the sole of his foot (2 Samuel 14:25); girls and women in many places (e.g., Job 42:15); the LORD (Psalm 27:4); holiness (1 Chronicles 16:29; 2 Chronicles 20:21; Psalm 29:2).

We see in the above and elsewhere in the Biblical texts on worship that involve the arts, that God designed his worship buildings (the tabernacle and the temple) as well as the furnishings, including the vestments of the clerical personnel associated with them, to have a dignified beauty that would glorify him. Are there any guidelines as to what is beautiful in the arts, including music?

Is it true, as many say, that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, that it’s all subjective? Or, *are there characteristics embedded in the works of art, architecture, music, and other forms of communication that are universally and over all time considered necessary for those things to be perceived as pleasing, i.e., having beauty?*² Are there transcendent universal principles or common norms that filter such works from generation to generation and cause some to become classics, that is that they pass through time and have lasting value? Are there universal principles that guide us to provide art and music that is generally considered beautiful by most if not all people everywhere and in all times so we can give of our best to God in his worship?

I suggest that in consideration of this subject the church will indeed find valuable principles for identifying and retaining the finest of both traditional and contemporary elements for honoring God in his worship. For example, some songs and hymns that have been written long ago, as

¹ The Hebrew word rendered beauty is תִּפְאֵרֶת (*tiph'ereh*), glory, beauty, adornment, splendor, honor.

² Throughout this essay I'll use the word art to refer to all of these media. By art and artist I mean to refer not only to the visual arts, e.g., paintings, sculpture, and tapestry, but also music and architecture. The principles discussed herein can also apply to written as well as oral communication.

well as some being written today, have been composed, either consciously or unconsciously, according to these universal aesthetic principles. And many have not; hence, they likely will not be used in worship 100 or more years from now. There is good and beautiful historic hymnody and that which is not so; there is also good and beautiful contemporary Christian music and that which is not so. *How do we discern the difference and select only that which is good and beautiful, that will honor and please God as well as accomplish the other objectives in corporate Christian worship that we've been studying (e.g., edify the worshipers)?*³

The main principle guiding what has been written in this manual is the Biblical basis. The manual, as indicated in the preface, is essentially a study of what the Bible says about what should be included or permitted in corporate worship. Its starting point and basis is God's special revelation.

In reflecting on the question before us in this appendix, that main principle will be operative, but we'll also look at the other type of revelation the Bible indicates that God uses, general revelation (e.g., Psalm 19:1-6, Romans 1:20), whereby he places in the world elements that communicate information about God, his character, and what pleases him. Included within that general revelation are statements from human authors, including [careful empirical science](#) (see "Essential Christianity" PowerPoint), that are consistent with God's special revelation. Even some of those human writings have been incorporated into Scripture (e.g., Acts 17:28, 1 Corinthians 15:33, Titus 1:12).

We've seen that the first of the principles for planning worship is to honor God. Concerning music, what music will most honor God? Obviously, it should be the best music we can compose and include in a worship service. How then do we discern what is "best?" What makes music or art great music or art?

Throughout many centuries careful thinkers have given consideration whether any universal principles could be deduced that would help identify what is beautiful. Since it is our duty to provide for God's worship that which is most beautiful and pleasing to him, we should give attention to this inquiry and apply the findings in our selection and planning of what we include in worship.

God's revelation in Scripture is our authority and the standard for what he requires in his worship. However, since he has commissioned and commanded us to bring the Good News of his plan of redemption in Jesus Christ to the whole world, and since his public corporate worship contains an evangelistic dimension, it behooves us to understand the mentality of the target population we are trying to reach with the Gospel. What qualities are generally considered by that population to constitute the beauty which attracts and engages them? Indeed, such universal qualities will also help us engage God's people as well.

³ See especially Lesson Three, "Key General Principles for Worship Planning."

Essential Elements that Constitute Beauty

The academic discipline in which we find the most study of this question is of course philosophy, and in particular its subfield of axiology, the study of value.⁴ This section of philosophy is divided into two branches, ethics (the study of conduct) and aesthetics (the study of what people consider beautiful).⁵ Thus, as we study God's common grace on the question before us, we'll reflect on what careful thinkers in the branch of aesthetics have observed.

Concerning the question of what constitutes beauty, Aristotle, Aquinas, and Jonathan Edwards among many others have studied the question of what it is that causes some works to be valued and therefore to last over time. They have discerned at least three essential elements, principles that recur in the art, music, and other work of people through the ages and throughout the world, that are present in something that is considered beautiful.⁶

There may be other qualities inherent in phenomena that are universally associated with perceiving a given phenomenon as beautiful. The three qualities identified below are not intended to be exhaustive. Other philosophers have suggested additional elements, e.g., purpose.⁷ However, in many if not most cases these additional factors can be reduced further to the three essentials. What are these three elements of beauty or principles to discern what is beautiful that are generally considered criteria of or standards for the perception of beauty, and how do they relate to worship?

Harmony

Dr. Steven Timmermans, then Executive Director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, wrote, "While I do appreciate a good solo performance, I have to admit that I have a special love of choral music. There is something beautiful that happens when alto, soprano, tenor, and bass voices all blend and harmonize together. The resulting sound is much fuller and greater than if you hear each voice separately."⁸ This observation is generally experienced, and yet, by harmony aestheticists do not mean only music in the sense of four-part harmony or with instrumentation. Regarding music, harmony can be observed in a cappella singing with even very little movement of the melody notes, e.g., in Gregorian and other chants.

Harmony includes disassociation with disharmony or cacophony, where parts clash with each other instead of relating in a proportionate manner. Harmony also involves not including sound to a level that causes physical pain. At a certain decibel level sound waves cause discomfort in the human ear and sometimes affect other parts of the body as well. That experience is not normally considered beautiful in any culture.

⁴ The word axiology comes from the Greek, ἀξιος (*axios*), worth, worthy and *logos*, word. See also Van Cleve Morris, *Philosophy and the American School: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 21.

⁵ The word aesthetics comes from the Greek, *aisthanesthanein*, to perceive; cf. (αἰσθάνομαι) *aisthanomai*, possess the power of perception and to understand. (Proverbs 17:10; 24:14; Luke 9:45) See also Morris, p. 224.

⁶ See R. C. Sproul in the CD series, *Worship*, on CD-2, Track 3, "The Sound of Worship" (Part 2) and CD-3, Track 1, "The Sound of Worship" (Part 3).

⁷ David Elton Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), pp. 127-130.

⁸ Steven Timmermans, "The Music of Denomination," *Ministry Report 2018: May It Be A Sweet, Sweet, Sound*, p. 2.

I attended a breakfast club for business executives in Oak Brook, Illinois, and on one occasion I sat next to the president of a company that had the contract for examining the hearing of students in the Chicago public school system. Recalling my work with young people in youth ministry and their desire to attend concerts with loud music and to listen to music with ear phones and the volume turned up very high, I said, “My guess is that you’re finding many young people whose hearing is declining.” “Oh yes!” the executive replied and continued, “By the time they’re 45 many will be legally deaf.”

I recently told this story to a young man who was installing a new refrigerator in our home. He said, “That man was right. I’m only 22 and already my hearing is shot!”

Harmony occurs in association with proportionality. Musically, it is consistent with the mathematical relationship with tones on the scale.

Harmony also involves lyrical consistency with the cherished values of the listener. A lovely score that contains lyrics that contrast with the cherished values of the audience will not be perceived as beautiful. Humans everywhere value ideas. Moreover, “ideas are powerful,” as a universal maxim maintains. Well-crafted music containing words in contrast to the Bible will not be perceived by most Christians as good. Even exceptionally beautiful music cannot transform concepts that are repugnant to the listeners, especially followers of Christ for whom Biblical truths have the supreme standard and eternal consequences. Recall the Biblical texts above that are associated with concepts that God’s Word calls beautiful, e.g., holiness.

One of the aspects of God’s image, rationality, involves the daily human task of making sense out of life. Thus, when a person sees that something “fits” with his or her worldview or philosophical and theological mental framework, it is not unusual to hear, “That’s beautiful!”

A Roman Catholic priest, Carlos Olivero, lives and works in a small concrete church in one of the slums of Buenos Aires, Argentina. He dwells in one of the *villas miserias* (“little cities of misery”) where many if not most people would have difficulty seeing anything they would be inclined to call beautiful. Knowing that earning the right to be heard necessarily precedes proclamation of words and the Word, he said his first focus is on helping people, not (at the beginning ostensibly) trying to convert them; nevertheless,

he believes that faith is contagious. “The best confessions I hear, I hear in the rehab center from kids who were hit men or dealers,” he said. “Kids who have been hurt a great deal, who have suffered a lot, and who have also made others suffer a lot are baptized, take their first Communion, get married, get their own children baptized. It is really, really beautiful.”⁹

For Christians maturing in progressive sanctification, lyrics powerfully affect perception of a hymn or song. With regard to lyrics, harmony includes congruency and compatibility with God’s Word. The presence or absence of lyrical harmony with Biblical theology can make a musical piece beautiful or displeasing. There are some older hymns and newer songs, the music of which I find pleasant, but in order to sing them I have to change certain words. No matter

⁹ Kate Linthicum, “Helping rather than converting: Argentina’s ‘slum priests’ take an activist path to fight poverty and drugs,” McClatchy Tribune article in *Reporter-Herald*, August 23, 2013, A12.

how pleasant the musical piece is, if its lyrics are contrary to, and therefore out of harmony with, the Bible, its beauty is lost.

“But not all people are Christians, so others may consider the music beautiful even if the lyrics are displeasing to you,” some may object, thinking that my principle lacks universality. They would be mistaking principle for application of principle. Would not that same person consider a tune he or she at first perceived as beautiful as distasteful, and therefore lacking in beauty, if the accompanying lyrics contradicted his or her most cherished values? Indeed, he or she would either change the words, or try to ignore them, before placing a value on the music and doing anything with it. The principle is that harmony with one’s values is an essential characteristic of what constitutes beauty. The application varies with the values of the beholder, but the principle is universal.

Regarding Biblical values, a relatively simple song that is not ostensibly very complex can be a profoundly moving and beautiful musical expression with carefully crafted lyrics that express a text in God’s Word or its application. Theologian R. C. Sproul cites “Jesus Loves Me this I know” as an example, especially when played by a skilled musician. German theologian, Karl Barth, controversial but widely considered to be one of the most erudite, weighty, and prolific theologians of the 20th century, whose writings, including his thirteen volume *Church Dogmatics*, are generally viewed as challenging to read, was once asked to cite the most profound concept he had ever contemplated. The questioner expected the professor to expound on a very complex doctrine and was stunned when Barth answered, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” While the song is simple, the profundity of the whole counsel of God underlies and is contained within it. Part of the greatness of Biblical truth is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is essentially simple, easily understood by everyone, but at the same time a closer investigation reveals a highly complex integration of knowledge and wisdom, including God himself; skills; mysteries; and applications that challenge, yet satisfy, the greatest minds, especially those who’ve had the veil of unbelief covering their minds and hearts, removed by the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 3:14-18)

Visual elements are perceived as beautiful if they are in harmony with the landscape, whether one is looking at a work of art or the live out-of-doors. Even if they have individual beauty per se, for example if they have many complex parts that are all in proportion, such as a dandelion, if they are out of harmony, they’re not perceived as beautiful in that setting.

Not long ago I was in our yard spraying a weed-killer on the dandelions. As I worked I began to think, “Why are these plants not perceived as beautiful? They have a lovely fragrance and pretty flowers that our granddaughters love to pick for bouquets, and over seventy-five years later I still remember my mother’s delicious dandelion salads.” Then, I recalled reading recent articles from a couple of naturalists who write weekly in our local newspaper who challenged the assumption that any plant is a weed. So why am I spending this time and money on removing the dandelions from the yard? One of the naturalists put his finger on the answer. He said that no plant is a weed, *especially if it is in its place*. The dandelions in the forest preserve are fine, because they are in concord, harmony, with the rest of the flora and fauna of God’s creation. The dandelions in our yard are discordant with the design of the yard with their helter-skelter distribution within the uniform sea of green grass that is itself within carefully formed boundaries.

Proportionality

Proportion is designed and built into our very being, and that norm shapes our perception and values. Externally, normal humans have two eyes equidistant from the nose and on the same level; the same is true for our ears. Each side has one arm attached to which is one hand with five fingers in a particular arrangement and one leg that has one foot with five toes in a specific order. The arms, hands, and fingers, legs, feet, and toes are all in symmetrical proportion to those on the opposite side. Male and female body parts are proportional to each other. When a human being is born with, or by accident acquires, a body part that is abnormal in its proportional form or placement with its corresponding opposite, that situation is perceived as imperfect and consideration is given to whether corrective measures are possible.

Internally, proportion in symmetry is seen in lungs, kidneys, and other organs. Physiologists refer to the phenomenon of homeostasis, the balance of components in the body's system that permits regular functioning. Educators in the developmental school of the psychology of human learning, observe equilibration, the healthy balance that occurs in mental processes.

When we look beyond ourselves we see proportion throughout nature. Animals typically have similar features in proportion, e.g., eyes, ears, legs. When an animal appears that is different, it is not unusual to hear someone say, "Oh! That's ugly!" Unless affected by environmental constraints, such as growing close to a building, one side of a tree mirrors the other; apples will not have a square side; snowflakes appear in the form of a hexagonal prism of latticework where each side is similar in shape to the other.

The musical scale is a mathematical relationship between and among the tones. Melody, harmony, and rhythm, three elements in music, are achieved by the configuration of tones in proportion with each other. Music is built upon certain tones in a scale. Scales simply measure the mathematical relationship of two or more sounds or tones to each other. Musicians try to keep their music in proportion. Music written in a certain key is played with respect to predictable parameters. In the West the basic mathematical relationship between chords is based on thirds, three steps. In the East it is based on relationships of fourths. But they are still harmonic and proportionate, just different from what we accustomed to hearing. Eastern music displays different forms and different structures but still with harmony and proportionality.

As Sproul explains, a jazz musician introduces dissonance by playing around with all three elements in music but not without respect to proportionality. Jazz music engages in delayed resolution, but it never moves away from proportionality and mathematical harmony. The harmony is still in proportion, but it isn't in the arithmetic ratio of what we commonly hear.

In classic art proportion is carefully implemented. The shadow of one building is not significantly shorter than the shadow of another the same size next to it, when the sun is shining in a direct line on both. A human figure is not taller than a mature oak tree nearby. The sides of a path in the background are narrower than those in the foreground.

Regarding architecture, consider the temple measurements in the Old Testament. Specifically for example, study Ezekiel 40-43. Notice the description of the sanctuary in 41:13-15, where we observe the 100 cubit symmetry symbolizing perfection, also proportionally positioned in relationship with the other structures in the temple complex.

Consider in addition the classic Gothic churches with their arched doorways and windows. One side of the arch is not shorter than the other. The opposite side complements the other exactly only in reverse; neither is out of proportion with its counterpart. In those structures that are in a cruciform shape, one side is the same size as its corresponding opposite.

Those who give thought to and value how their food looks see another illustration of the link between proportionality and the beauty they desire. Culinary connoisseurs consider the importance of beauty in food presentation as being essential. An Italian chef has described the role of proportionality in developing a dish that is pleasing to the eye. In an interview in *Relish* magazine, Tuscan-born Pino Luongo, co-owner of Coco Pazzo restaurant in New York City and co-author of the book, *Two Meatballs in the Italian Kitchen* (Artisan, 2007), explained why he couldn't just plop two big juicy meatballs on top of a mound of spaghetti. "That's my problem with it—the proportions are all off. Italians like their food to make sense aesthetically, for the sauce to fit with the pasta. And there's nothing more incongruous than a big meatball with a skinny strand of spaghetti. I say serve the spaghetti as a first course and save the meatballs for a second."¹⁰

Jeremy Begbie notes that Bavinck and Kuyper view "beauty as harmony with a particular resplendence: 'Beauty exists in the agreement between content and form, idea and appearance; in harmony, proportion, unity in differentiation, organization; in splendour, glory, radiant perfection, perfection phaenomenon.'"¹¹

Complexity

A beginning piano student, who is able to play lesson three even perfectly, is not ready for Carnegie Hall. Why not? Because musical pieces that are very simple are not valued as highly as those that are much more complex and superior to what we ourselves can do, or could do if we tried. For example, music that involves the combination of many notes, instruments, and voices in harmony and proportionality, is given lasting value. We appreciate "sound that is transcendently majestic," as Sproul says. Such sound facilitates our worship of the One who himself is transcendently majestic and complex. Notice the rich complexity of the Hallelujah Chorus of Handel's *Messiah* even though lyrically containing few words. The complexity explains why Handel's *Messiah* is highly valued, and significantly more so, than many recent songs that also repeat a few words over and over again.

Complexity involves the harmonization of many elements of an artistic expression, whether it is in music, art, architecture, or a well-crafted oration, such as a sermon or a lecture. A key aspect of complexity is exquisite attention to detail.

We also see the principle of complexity in art. There is a significant difference between a stick figure of a human being and the Mona Lisa. The attention to detail in paintings attracts our attention and reflection for long periods of time and over many occasions. Stick figures do not stimulate that response.

¹⁰ "Two Meatballs," *Relish*, September 2008, p. 5.

¹¹ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2006), p. 99.

Complexity contributes positively to home ambience and visual attractiveness. Interior design experts urge homeowners to employ a strategic configuration of texture and patterns “in floors, walls, upholstery, window treatments...[and to stick] to small, neutral patterns that can be a subtle way to add visual interest and design complexity to interior spaces.”¹²

The more complex a piece of art or music is, the greater depth it has. This is not to say that the only beautiful music, or the only music that is acceptable to God, is highly complex. The key task for writers of music and worship leaders in congregational singing, as Calvin University Professor John Witvliet has written, is to become “masters of making complex ingredients come together with winsome simplicity,”¹³ and, I would add, so the people can sing the piece, and ideally to retain it for future edification, reflection, inspiration, and action.

What we have just been considering is what normally occurs in the perception of what is beautiful. These principles also apply in exceptional situations as well. Values beyond the visual, shape worth that forms beauty and is perceived as good.

A husband watching the surgeon remove the bandages from his wife’s head saw her misshapen face. One side was now out of proportion to the other. The physician explained that he could not remove a cancerous growth without severing the nerve that permitted one side of her mouth to move; she would from now on have a sagging cheek and drooping lips on that side of her face. All in the room, and especially his wife, were deeply moved when the husband bent over her, caressed her mouth in his hands, kissed her, and then said, “She will always be beautiful.” Why? How? Because the complex totality of her most cherished characteristics in harmony and proportion with her husband’s greatest values eclipsed the less important physical features of the one side of her face. The once beautiful person remained beautiful to her husband and others who knew her even after a tragic defacing of one facet of her being.¹⁴

Nature

As noted earlier in this essay, these three characteristics are not exhaustive. In my observation of what people describe as beautiful, it can be argued that nature and what is viewed as natural is perceived as beautiful. Does that include the deserts, the treeless tundra, the barren snow-covered landscape of Antarctica, and other such places? I submit it does. Consider the similar perspective of the late 19th and early 20th century naturalist, conservationist, family man, farmer, and writer, John Muir, who said, “God never made an ugly landscape. All that the sun shines on is beautiful, so long as it is wild.”¹⁸ By “wild” I interpret that Muir means natural, unaltered by human activity. Recall the many picturesque scenes portrayed on TV, typically in ads, which show a lake surrounded by trees, flowers, and mountains; have you ever seen any houses or other man-made structures on those lakes? Rarely if ever; I can’t think of one.

¹² “From floor to fixtures: Top spring home décor trends add style and personality,” *Reporter-Herald*, AT HOME, March 29, 2014, p. 12.

¹³ John D. Witvliet, “We Are What We Sing,” *Reformed Worship*, Volume 60, p. 9.

¹⁴ Quoted in “John Muir: Father of Our National Parks,” by Lisa Zhito, *American Profile*, August 26-September 1, 2012, p. 8.

To the degree that something is perceived in its natural state, functioning as God intended, is it not universally seen as beautiful, even in this age? For example, Jesus referred to the lilies of the field as having a splendor that surpassed the regalia of King Solomon. (Matthew 6:29)

Pertaining to worship in the tabernacle and the temple, consider the ark of the covenant for the most holy place, the holy of holies, where the LORD would dwell with his people (though separated from sinful humans until Christ Jesus' perfect redemption for us tore open the curtain¹⁵ giving those credited by our faith with his righteousness [Romans 4] access to the presence of God [Matthew 27:51]). The ark was to be made out of acacia wood, together with the poles for carrying it. The beautiful and natural acacia wood, common in the Sinai peninsula, is a very hard wood, even harder than oak, a close-grain wood that wood-eating insects avoid. (Exodus 25:10) Added to its natural beauty, the ark was to be covered with pure gold (Exodus 25:11), not gold containing impurities. The gold was not only natural, but since it was beautiful and supremely valued, it was fitting that the ark, also called the mercy seat, be for God who is the highest and most precious of all, infinitely more so than all else, and as a daily reminder of that supreme reality. The main hall of the temple was paneled with pine and covered with fine gold. (2 Chronicles 3:5)

Pertaining to sanctuaries for worship today, wood is much warmer and more beautiful and conducive to facilitating the appreciation and worship of God for his creation and redemption than man-made concrete blocks. What we're thinking about here is facilitating worshipers' attention to, appreciation of, and glorifying God. This reality regarding wood and other natural elements does not mean that a congregation cannot or should not worship in a Quonset steel hut or a concrete block building; it is only to say that natural settings provide an ambience that significantly assists worship. Most important, of course, is the theology of the worship service. It is much better to worship in any kind of structure where the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed than to worship in a beautiful place where unbiblical heresy and abomination are being espoused.

Consider also the natural color of human hair: most people would say that the natural color of a young person's hair has beauty. Even though some gentlemen may prefer blondes, would not most agree that brunettes and those with naturally red hair are attractive as well? Further, as people age, and hair turns gray, that too is valued. In Proverbs 16:31 we read, "Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life." Yet many today choose to color their hair, and when those who do so with hues closest to a natural color, it is also typically considered beautiful. In fact, many would not be able to tell it is not the person's natural color. Some in your group may remember the old Clairol commercial: "Does she or doesn't she [color her hair]?" On the other hand, not a few, mostly younger adults, who color their hair choose colors that are not natural. The former are typically considered beautiful, but many do not consider the unnatural colors beautiful.

Notice as well that throughout history, the colors of clerical, choral, and other liturgical vestments are natural and also communicate a message conducive to God's Word for his worship. Strange colors are disconcerting and distract attendees' focus on and worship of God.

¹⁵ Significantly, the curtain was torn from top to bottom, [evidence of a divine intervention](#). See the discussion in "The Biblical Significance of Easter Signs and Symbols" in the Christology section of the Christian Worship page.

For much more on distractions and their interference and other counterproductive effects on worship see Lesson One in the worship manual.

Begbie explains that “earthly beauty participates in that higher, absolute beauty which rests in God alone. It is God’s perfect beauty which sends its rays into our hearts through nature and art.”¹⁶

Consider theologian Francis Schaeffer’s observation. He quotes Sir Archibald Russell (1904—1995), the British designer for the innovative supersonic intercontinental Concorde airliner, who explains how nature not only shapes our perception of what is beautiful but requires adherence in order to produce and maximize functionality, another part of beauty.

In a *Newsweek: European Edition* interview (February 15, 1975) [Russell] was asked: “Many people find that the Concorde is a work of art in its design. Did you consider its esthetic appearance when you were designing it?” His answer was, “When one designs an airplane, he must stay as close as possible to the laws of nature. You are really playing with the laws of nature and trying not to offend them. It so happens that our ideas of beauty are those of nature. Every shape and curve of the Concorde is arranged so it will conform with the natural flow as conditioned by the laws of nature.”¹⁷

In the beginning the things and people God made were “good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and “very good” (1:31), including beautiful (Ecclesiastes 3:11). However, since the fall of Adam and Eve and the sin that introduced corruption, disharmony and distortion into God’s creation (Romans 8:22), some of the inherent beauty has been lost. Thus, in this age not all that is natural is beautiful, such as a grove of trees where a tornado has just torn through it. Not beautiful in form, but it still has an element of beauty in content—harmony with God’s Word in which that aspect of nature in this age is seen in its groaning that will continue until the fullness of redemption occurs. (Romans 8:22 ff.) God created the daylight, which was good (Genesis 1:3-5, 14-19), including the beauty of [the moon, which is a miracle in itself](#) (see “Essential Christianity” and the essay, “Who is God, and what is he like? Part 8: Creator,”) and the stars. It was only after sin entered the world that the darkness of evening became a synonym for disharmony, evil, and fear. Even now, though, viewing the nighttime sky, it is easy, especially through the eyes of a believer in Christ, to see its beauty.

Dutch theologian, professor, and author, Abraham Kuyper, who was also prime minister of The Netherlands, explains how and when that aspect of nature will become beautiful again. Jeremy Begbie interprets Kuyper at this point.

In its original state, Kuyper believes, the world possessed a perfect beauty. But through human sin, disfigurement and ugliness marred the world, and, despite the restraining influence of common grace, it remains spoiled. In Jesus Christ, however, we see our human nature climb “from the depths of scorn to the most beautiful harmony of glory. Christ...is the canon and ideal of all beauty.”
...Beauty therefore must now be understood in the light of Jesus Christ, through

¹⁶ Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise*, p. 99.

¹⁷ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1976), p. 196.

whom all things were created (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16), and in whom creation is restored to its intended beauty. In his earthly life, the beauty of Jesus was inward and hidden, but in his risen life, it is displayed in all its splendour, and is now revealed through those who follow him.

“Our being cannot be satisfied unless the thirst for beauty is quenched. That is why the child of God fights for beauty and holiness, because at the creation man was absolutely beautiful. The beautiful and the good for which Plato was searching will come when the Lord returns.”¹⁸

Transcendence

A fifth universal characteristic of beauty is what I call transcendence. As Jeremy Begbie describes it, the artistic quality, while embracing [or does not despise] the physical, causes the viewer/listener to experience a sense of rising to the spiritual, is a dimension of beauty.

In short, God is steadfastly committed to the flourishing of the world, and this is itself an expression of his steadfast love displayed in the crucified and risen Messiah.

This is a commitment with a *future*. The world is made to go somewhere, to prosper toward its end. It has a destiny, promised and embodied in Christ. Its present beauty and glory are not to be worshiped but to be valued as foretastes of the coming glory of God. Indeed, the poignancy of nature’s beauty, the fact that its glory is so interlaced with transience (how we long to say to the sunset, “Hold it right there!”) can serve to remind us of just this. Creation awaits an end not yet given. Its present beauty is wonderful but not final.¹⁹

One could argue that this transcendence is a dimension of harmony, the characteristic something has that makes it in harmony with God and a foretaste of the future for all eternity with God. Yet, I see the characteristic of transcendence as not only a component but a process, which gives it a related, even integral, but distinct quality of its own, even as proportion and complexity can overlap somewhat with harmony; for example the elements that are in proportion with each other frequently demonstrate a dimension of harmony, as do complex components. Further, emphasizing the distinction of transcendence preserves its crucial connection in the cosmos and beyond, since in Biblical theology, God transcends the universe. (Cf., e.g., Psalm 113:4-6).

In this view of transcendence, our Biblical roots will also not let us spurn the physical; no place exists in Scripture for a Gnostic view of the cosmos. Something is beautiful not because it has separated from its physical or material origin. Its beauty emerges as one observes its connection

¹⁸ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2006), p. 97. Begbie here quotes Kuyper as translated by Hans R. Rookmaaker in *Art and the Public Today*, Huemoz-sur-Ollon, Switzerland: L’Abri Fellowship Foundation, 1969, p. 51. Cp. DGG, III, 546-557. In the previous paragraph Begbie references Kuyper in *Het Calvinisme*, pp. 12 and 13.

¹⁹ Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 196. On this page Begbie also comments on complexity.

with God in his making of it and its intended purpose within his creation; it points not to itself but beyond itself to its Creator. (Cf. Ecclesiastes 3:11) With Begbie I like Carol Harrison's explanation of this reality:

As with all temporal manifestations of music (as harmony, unity, order...) in the created realm, therefore, whilst appreciating the beauty of music as it is sung in Church, Augustine never ceases to emphasize the need to move beyond and through it: beyond and through the temporal, mutable and bodily towards the eternal, immutable and spiritual. For as long as he is caught up in the sheer beauty, delight and pleasure of the temporal manifestations of music, for that moment he knows that he is distracted from God and risks taking it as an end in itself.²⁰

However, some may object, is this a characteristic of something that is universally viewed by people throughout the world as being beautiful? What about people who are not Christians? And what about atheists?

We read in Ecclesiastes 3:11 that God "has set eternity in the hearts of men;" and Romans 2:14 and 15 refer to inherent qualities built into human beings with the clear implication that this reality has been from creation:

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

As Augustine prayed, "[man] cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you."²¹ While it does exist and has for millennia,²² atheism is relatively rare throughout time and across the globe. Though hyperbole, the often-repeated maxim, most recently recited by my barber who is a veteran, "There are no atheists in foxholes," contains much truth. Notice also how in the aftermath of the tragic death of teenagers who attended a large public high school, people, not just Christians, in that district flock to the auditorium to hear a Christian youth worker explain the teaching of the Bible on death and the afterlife, which many admit offers by far the most reasonable explanation and the greatest hope.

²⁰ Carol Harrison, "Augustine and the Art of music" in *Musical Theology*, ed. Jeremy Begbie and Steven Guthrie quoted in Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 86.

²¹ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Cox and Wyman Ltd., 1961), p. 21.

²² Cf. Psalm 14:1, "The fool says in his heart, 'there is no God.'"

A colleague on the staff of a large church in suburban Chicago, was previously the area director of the highly effective parachurch ministry, Young Life. He told me one day, that whenever a high school student lost his or her life, especially through suicide or a tragic accident, the whole school was traumatized and devastated. My colleague was well-known by the young people, and so he would be called to speak in a school-wide assembly to the whole student body. The superintendent would tell him, “These students are so distraught, that they need help and hope to cope. You tell them whatever you want to tell them.” So with no restrictions my friend brought a strong message, including telling them of their greatest help and hope: the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ and the future with the Triune God.

Humans long for a connection with the divine (cf., Ecclesiastes 3:11), and view that which facilitates our connection with God as beauty in the utmost. For those of us who have the new nature, being regenerated by the Holy Spirit, we value that which draws us to God as having ultimate beauty. Not long ago, as I was driving in my car, I tuned into the Roman Catholic global network, EWTN, in time to hear the end of a program wherein the interviewee said, “Holiness is attractive; beauty is seen in purity.” She was right!

Holiness and beauty are linked in the Bible especially in the transcendent character of God and in our relationship with, especially our worship of, him. As the Scriptures say,

Give unto the LORD the glory *due* unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. (1 Chronicles 16:29 [KJV])

And when he [King Jehoshaphat] had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy *endureth* for ever. (2 Chronicles 20:21 [KJV])

Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. (Psalm 29:2 [KJV])

O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth. (Psalm 96:9 [KJV])

All human beings are aware of the possibility, even the existence, of God, whether they acknowledge his reality or not,

because that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, *even* his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse... Romans 1:19-20 (ASV)

Due to sin, the veil of which distorts reality and is especially operative in those who have not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, much confusion exists as to who God is, what he is like, and

how he functions throughout the world. Nevertheless, as people perceive the invisible things of God through the things that he has made, which point to him, e.g., the [sun and the moon](#), those things are viewed as having beauty, even though the human beings perceiving them do not confess God's existence as he has revealed himself in his Word.

Moreover, the naysayers are not the norm, nor is their negativism attractive. Most people believe in God or a higher being whom they consider as existing above them. They also see him as having created the world. Thus, when they perceive things as having a connection with their Creator, whose character has imprinted those things with value, they are also perceived as having beauty.

Internationally regarded sculptor, Lynn Aldrich, also links beauty with the transcendent by observing that

The concept of 'the sublime' in aesthetic philosophy might be described as the overwhelming presence of beauty, tinged with terror, in nature's sweeping vistas or in large-scale works of art. The viewer is reminded of her human frailty, the insignificance of her life-span in the vastness of space and the antiquity of time. Yet there is exaltation. We can sense a similar experience in biblical descriptions of the Israelites as they followed Yahweh across the empty desert, erecting piles of stones to mark where he spoke or to commemorate great events of his deliverance. This impulse to make sculpture when in awe of the transcendent was shared by most ancient peoples, though usually the carved or stacked stone was formed into idols, altars, or grave markers. Rather than making God into a thing, the Jews uniquely insisted that sculpture could refer to him or remind us of our need of him while still remaining a mound of material. Understanding God to be wholly spirit yet capable of and desiring relationship with human beings in bodies of flesh, in a world of matter, is one of their foundational contributions to western culture with far-reaching ramifications. This can perhaps also be understood as a foreshadowing of the coming of the Messiah, the incarnation.²³

Transcendence also has a personal dimension. As the late Dr. Arthur DeKruyter, Founder and Senior Pastor of the more than 5,000 member Christ Church of Oak Brook in suburban Chicago, maintained, anthropologically there exists within each normal healthy human being the desire to better him or herself in all ways, including ontologically, socially, relationally, materially, and spiritually. DeKruyter said, "People are looking for ways to transcend what they are now. They look for models on the social scale above them; they don't strive to be like those who have less than they do or who are viewed by society as on a 'lower rung of the social ladder' than they are. They look for people who can help them improve, and those to whom they look for such help are ones with a consistent track record of producing such fruit."²⁴

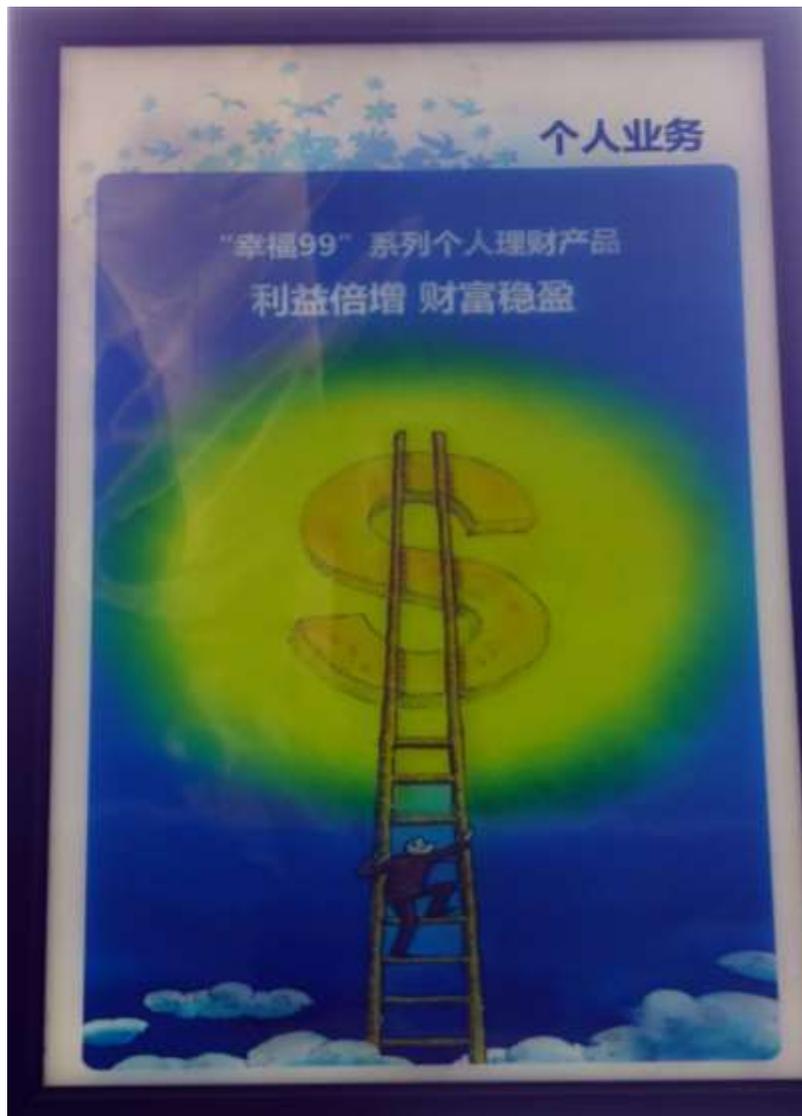
Human beings look for ways to transcend what they are now. While pride generally stalls or retards the public, and sometimes even the private, admission of any inadequacy or

²³ Lynn Aldrich, "Through Sculpture: What's the Matter with Matter?" in Jeremy Begbie, ed., *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 106.

²⁴ Dr. DeKruyter, and I who served with him for 19 years as Minister of Education and as a friend for many years after, had countless conversations that contained philosophical and theological dimensions, and in a number of which he mentioned these unrecorded but memorable observations.

insufficiency, people nevertheless strive to be and have more than they do now. Whatever is perceived as helping achieve that transcendence of the status quo, is valued and considered beautiful. Do we not hear people enthusiastically upon the accomplishment of a high goal exclaim with much satisfaction, “Beautiful!”?

I was in a bank in Nanjing, China in November 2013, and as I was looking at the well-appointed interior design, I noticed this poster which follows on the wall.²⁵ As a graphic illustration of the universal Biblical anthropology, especially for most of mankind who are unregenerate (Matthew 6:24; 7:13-14), it is quite accurate. For God’s people, who are on the same ladder but who have the new nature (John 3:5) and are growing in sanctification (e.g., Ephesians 4:11-16), the graphic should have God at the top.



Believers and followers of Jesus Christ, who are maturing in him (Ephesians 4: 12-24), eagerly desire to relate to God in worship that continues beyond the sanctuary and

²⁵ Photo by Amy Lay, November 11, 2013, Nanjing, China.

throughout all of life. When that transcendence of the status quo involves the decision and accompanying actions of no longer conforming to the ways of the world and transforming by renewing our minds, we worship God in so doing.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)²⁶

Teaching the Appreciation of Beauty

Throughout the Bible we see God teaching his people and in the process using a principle that educators refer to as integrative reconciliation, relating new ideas to previous understanding. It is relating the unknown to the known, beginning where people are and leading them to the next level of understanding. Singing “Jesus Loves Me” in the same corporate worship service that also includes the Hallelujah Chorus (especially when standing to sing it with the choral and instrumental ministry),²⁷ not only engages the children and others who are oriented to that which is simple, but also exposes them to the rich detail and awesomely thrilling affective experience which stimulates further understanding of and love for God and what he has done, and which evokes worship and steps toward commitment.

A blending of the traditional hymns and newer songs that are beautiful serves to engage all worshippers. In this way each person can connect with what he or she values, enjoys, and perceives as good.²⁸

The essential message of the Bible, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ in particular, is simple. Several texts contain the essence of the Gospel in one verse, e.g., John 3:16; 14:6; Romans 10:9. Other passages have the essence of the Gospel in just a few verses, e.g., Ephesians 2:8-10; Galatians 3:26-29; Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 3:20-22. Yet for those whose minds raise questions about what they have heard, when they look more closely, they see a profound understanding and wisdom that enables them to make sense out of life and find greater joy. The same is true for the elements in worship that facilitate the response of God's people to worship him.

²⁶ See also my essay, “*Who is God, and what is he like? Part 24: What is meant by God's Providence?*” and also my PowerPoint program, [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology](#), both resources on the Christian Theology page of my Website, [From Acorn to Oak](#). Everything on my Website is free and may be used with my permission for church education worldwide.

²⁷ For those churches that are smaller and unable to have the trained voices and instrumentalists who are able to sing and play for the Hallelujah Chorus, if projection technology is available, that portion of Handel's *Messiah* could be portrayed on the screen at that point in the worship service.

²⁸ Research in the field of communication, the subfield called diffusion of innovations, has identified five key attributes of an innovation that are critical to their adoption and diffusion through a social system (including a church; see Lesson Nine, *Helpful Steps for Trying Something New*). The five attributes include compatibility with one's personal values and beliefs as well as with previously introduced ideas (cf. integrative reconciliation). Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, Fourth Edition (New York: The Free Press, 1995), pp. 224-228.

Recall the careful and exquisite attention to detail that God commanded in the complex construction of the tabernacle and the temple. Accordingly remember the precise specifications he required in the dress of the priests. (Exodus 28) These texts clearly communicate God's value on beauty, reflecting the beauty of his creation in its original state, that which still remains, and that which he is in the process of restoring. That he has called us to participate in that process as his agents is the broader framework of our mission.

Higher levels of beauty do exist, and it is our duty as Christians to employ these higher levels of beauty in the worship of God and to help others to do so. A bud is beautiful, but who wants it to stay that way? Is not the flower it is becoming a higher level of beauty? Should we not nurture the bud so that it can blossom into what God designed it to be and contribute to the enhancement of his creation? Indeed, is this not part of our calling and commission in Christ?

As Sproul observes, some music is infantile and does not honor God as he deserves in his worship. Moreover, the use of some music has been used counterproductively in corporate worship, as noted in Lesson Three, Key General Biblical Principles for Worship Planning, in this manual. In this connection see also the other principles studied in Lesson Three.

We need to help people acquire and develop a sense of recognition and taste for the richness and depth of meaning of music and art that has complexity. These competencies can be learned. To do so is not to be confused with condoning elitism and snobbery; these are ungodly motivations. The motivation we're considering here is offering our best to God in worship. Expose worshipers to what Sproul refers to as "the majestic measure of beauty." Good, i.e., aesthetically beautiful, music tends to last, inspire, and motivate, corporately and personally.

Can we acquire and develop a deeper taste for music? We can. It is a matter of edification, beginning with helping people develop the skill of listening. In accord with the principle of integrative reconciliation, we need to keep the simple to include, attract, retain, and engage those for whom the simple is valued while at the same time facilitating their understanding of, appreciation for, and movement toward the more complex, to deeper levels of beauty, and to offer such for those already oriented toward appreciation for the more detailed, nuanced, and advanced understanding.

As worship leaders part of our calling is to include higher levels of harmony, proportionality and complexity. Sproul says, "It is our duty as Christians to seek a deeper understanding of beauty, as it is our duty to seek a deeper understanding of goodness and of truth. Some of our music is infantile, and we ought not to be willing to stay at that level. We must give of our best to God in our singing."

Abraham Kuyper said that

when musicians aim at less than God's glory, they cheapen what they do. Cacophony, often enough, results. Music has a higher aim than simply pleasing the ear or creating misguided emotion; the purpose of the human voice, of vibrating strings, of brass and cymbal, is to witness to God's goodness. Where the purpose is less than that, God's people sense something wrong. Music has

tremendous influence for good and evil. Bad music counts its victims by thousands. We should be wary.²⁹

When we consider giving our best to God in his worship, that would seem in the light of the above to include all three criteria of beauty: harmony, proportionality, and complexity. If my musical skills do not produce a presentation with those criteria, does that mean that I shouldn't play a particular instrument or write or sing songs? Not at all. However, it does mean that I should keep striving for the accomplishment of such a standard and that I shouldn't make presentations in God's corporate worship until they do meet such criteria, lest my presentation distract from the worshipers' dialogue with God.

How do we help people perceive what is beautiful and good, what does contain the three criteria? Research on teaching suggests that modeling is a powerful instructional tool. As you include in your worship a balanced selection of high quality music that engages all worshipers, the congregation will grow in its appreciation for such different genres and be inspired as well as edified by them.

John Witvliet has identified other ways to teach appreciation of musical beauty. In a section entitled "On Cultivating Taste" in his essay "We Are What We Sing," he urges church musicians to "not only choose and play music creatively [but also] to teach people the skills to appreciate and receive these gifts." For example, for one hymn per week he advocates putting instruction in the weekly bulletin regarding the singing of that selection. Such instruction could be with one word (he suggests an adverb, e.g., meditatively or boldly) or with a term, phrase, or one or more sentences. "Sense the hope amid sadness as you sing this lament (that includes a skillful mix of minor chords but ends with a hopeful change of mode and rhythm)."

He also advocates hosting a living room sing-along for church members where they sing old favorites and are introduced to fresh new songs and hymns; listing fine recordings of Christmas music in the December issue of the church newsletter; bimonthly brief commentaries about the musical selections of the day's service in the Sunday bulletin; providing the church's children who are studying piano with simplified accompaniments to excellent hymns and songs so that they can learn them in their youth.³⁰ See also Lesson Seven, Intergenerational Worship, for other ideas.

For Further Reflection, Discussion, and Action

1. As a group or individually read Ezekiel 40-43. If time is short, focus on 41:13-15. Ask the question, "As described in this text, does the temple look beautiful?" Then ask, "Why would you say the temple is beautiful?"
2. What elements in the essay in this appendix inform your decision as to the questions in #1 above?

²⁹ Abraham Kuypers, *Near Unto God* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997), p. 137.

³⁰ Witvliet, p. 8.

3. Match the statements in the following feature story, that appeared on pages one and two of the local newspaper in Loveland, Colorado, with the characteristics of what constitutes beauty described in the above essay.³¹

STAINED-GLASS PORTAL INTO BIBLE STORIES

Mount Olive Lutheran Church installs final sets of windows depicting scenes from the Old and New Testaments

Church members chose the theme and layout of the windows and stained-glass artist Ron Rayer...did the artwork and installation....

Rayer installed the last four sets...on the building's south side that depict New Testament events, opposite the windows on the north side focused on the Old Testament.

[Proportionality]

"We put a stone border around each window," Rayer said. "It's like you're looking through a portal into each time frame of the Bible—the Old Testament and the New Testament." [Proportionality]

[C]hurch members voted on a theme.... The windows are co-themed based on the church's name of Mount Olive, incorporating the symbolism of the olive tree flowing forth from the Creation, and the mountains, where biblical events occurred. The Old Testament windows depict event where God spoke to the Israelites, while those representing the New Testament show the birth and life of Christ. [Harmony, Creation, Transcendence]

"We chose Old Testament events that occurred on mountaintops," said [church member Kathryn] Paulson, who worked with [Pastor Mark] Nierman to design the windows. "The olive branch, mountains and water run through all the windows." [Harmony, Creation/Nature]

Rayer...cut out tens of thousands of pieces of glass, cutting 3,600 just for the tree of life. [Complexity]

Nierman plans to hold a blessing of the stained glass during a Sunday morning worship service...He will explain the symbolism of each window and discuss how they point to Christ.... "It adds a beauty to our worship space. The congregation responded really well to it and really loved it," the pastor said. [Transcendence]

³¹ Shelley Widhalm, "Stained-Glass Portal into Bible Stories," *Reporter-Herald*, November 22, 2014, 1A and 2A.

4. Identify at least one component in current worship, in your church congregation or that is commonly being done today in church worship services, where people differ as to its beauty, or that cannot even be described as beautiful.
 - a. Which of the criteria of beauty mentioned in this essay does the subject identified lack? Can it be improved sufficiently to be beautiful? If so, how?
 - b. List at least three steps that can be taken to help resolve the conflict that the above practice and/or other differences are causing in the church. Which of the above steps will you commit to doing?
5. What can you say to someone who accuses you of “not being ‘with it,’” of “being behind the times,” of being “an old fuddy-duddy,” of “having to accommodate to the new ways of looking at things,” just because you don’t see them as beautiful when he or she does?

For the reasons cited in this essay, just because someone else says something is beautiful, that does not make it so. Now you have solid, objective reasons for explaining why something is lacking beauty, or lacking sufficient beauty, why beauty is not just in the eye of the beholder, and how you can help others to learn what is truly beautiful, and not only to humans but, most importantly, to God. May he bless you in accord with all you need as you seek to help implement the necessary changes to make his worship more beautiful, and as you teach others to do so as well.

Appendix G: Facilitating Worshipers' Physical Safety

Many of God's people throughout history have had to be cautious concerning corporate worship. When the Israelites returned from the Exile, they faced opposition in rebuilding the temple and the wall of Jerusalem. (Ezra 4:1-24; Nehemiah 4:1-23) They had to rebuild the wall in order to be protected from their enemies and to worship God in peace. Even while rebuilding the wall, their enemies plotted to kill them, but the Israelites prayed and stationed armed guards, whom God also used to protect his people and enable them to complete their work rebuilding the wall. For the first three centuries after Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, the church was not accepted and was persecuted throughout the Roman Empire; Christians had to worship in believers' homes and in other locations (e.g., Acts 2:46; 20:7-12; Philemon 1:2), but not in a church building of their own, as countless Christians have had to do in many countries throughout the world ever since. But rarely in the West has the church experienced violence of any kind in public worship.

Until the 21st Century. The Western hemisphere as presently established has largely been founded on a Christian worldview, due to the missionary work that occurred with the spread of European colonization, Europe at that time being largely Christian in orientation. European colonization had a dual goal, financial and spiritual. Wherever these colonists went to open up new economic opportunities, they also had a strong sense of mission to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those places and to the rest of the world. Thus, the spread of the Gospel message together with the operation of the Holy Spirit on human minds and hearts, significantly retarded evil and promoted the culture-transforming peace and love of Christ together with prosperity. One of the results of the strong Christian emphasis in Western culture has been the ability of Christians, and others, to worship in peace, with little if any worry about violent people attacking worshipers or their church buildings.

Until now. As the culture of the Western hemisphere has not only allowed but facilitated the fostering of secularization, together with other concomitant factors counterproductive to the spread and influence of the Gospel of Christ Jesus, many manifestations of evil have increased. Thus, we are seeing a growing number of church bombings, mass murders, threats, and other violence against Christians and others, including as they are trying to worship.

Such violence causes much concern. People want to know that when they come to their place of worship, they, their families, and the other members of their congregation will be physically safe.

Therefore, many church congregations throughout the United States have established a plan to provide for such safety and security. More congregations are in the process of doing so. The main motivation by far that causes the church, the body of Christ, to undertake such a plan is due to love. The Lord has commanded that we love one another, indeed all people, and such plan is a key way to show that love.*

* If another reason is needed to persuade any church leader for the need of such a plan, remind that person of the need to avoid culpability and resultant litigation. Not all attendees at church worship are Christians. It is clear in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 that Christians must not sue one another, but not all who attend church worship are mature Christians who are at the stage in their sanctification process where they desire to implement all teachings of God's Word in their daily lives. If an active shooter were to show up at a worship service, and an attorney could show that the church has not done all it could or should to prevent such incidents and the harm they perpetrate, the

One way this plan is implemented is by forming a special committee or team to develop a security system and operate it in an ongoing basis. While such a team is called by different titles in different places, my home church refers to its team that is charged with this responsibility as its Security Task Force (STF). A church STF meets as often as necessary to put into place, oversee, and update its plan, which is one means God provides for the security and safety of people attending worship and the other activities in the life and work of the church, including a school if it has one. In their plan, they undertake numerous steps to implement that plan.

Whether your church is in the Eastern hemisphere or the Western hemisphere, of course subject to the laws in your nation, state/province, and community, the following is a checklist that your congregation can use to establish a plan that will inform worshipers that they can attend worship with the understanding that they will be doing so with personnel and other safeguards in place so they don't need to worry about their safety. Such an awareness will foster their motivation to attend worship and participate in the related special Christian fellowship the Bible calls koinonia, which is unique to the body of Christ. This checklist is a series of steps that produce such plan with the subsequent results, and presented as a checklist, your STF and the congregation will know when you have your plan well in place. Of course, you should feel free to add items to the checklist that will meet your congregation's needs now and in days to come.

A Checklist for Establishing a Church Security Task Force

1. Select a leader for the Security Task Force (STF).

- In countries where applicable, is there a present or former police officer, member of your country's armed forces, or another first responder in your congregation, who would be willing to lead, or serve on, the STF? Such a background isn't required, but it would be beneficial.

2. Obtain official church authorization as to under whose auspices the STF will do its work and report.

a. To whom will the STF serve under and report?

1) The pastor?

2) The elder board?

3) Or others? If so, to whom? _____

b. How often will these reports need to be given?

c. What is the precise definition of the task with which the STF is charged?

congregation would not be on strong legal ground to avoid and withstand and win law suits. Furthermore, in addition to not sufficiently caring for his people, such unnecessary financial loss is not good stewardship of the Lord's money.

- 1) Does the STF have a job description, or does it have to develop one?
- 2) Is the task limited to physical security caused by human violence toward worshipers?
- 3) Will the task also include plans for a congregation's preparation for other threats and hazards, including, e.g., earthquakes, fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis?
- 4) Will the STF also be expected to provide a plan for cybersecurity, e.g., to protect worshipers who want to give their offering at that point in the worship service via the church's Website?
- 5) If the STF job description is limited to task #1 (physical security caused by human violence), how will the church provide protection in these other matters? _____

3. Select the members, at least three, who will serve on the STF.

4. Beginning at the first meeting of the STF, identify what is needed in your church congregation that will constitute a sufficient plan to help people feel secure enough to attend worship regularly. Decide how often the STF needs to meet, and when, and where meetings will be held. Include the following and any other parts of the plan your church needs. Specify that this is an open ended list; new ideas can always be added as needed and desired.

a. Are locks on all doors of the building?

b. Decide the following about the doors and windows of the building:

- 1) Are the current doors and windows and their locks sufficiently strong enough to resist easy breaking and entering, or should new and reinforced doors (and windows?) be installed?
- 2) Should any additional bars or other restraints be added to the existing doors, windows, and any other points of access?
- 3) Which door(s) and window(s) will remain locked and which one(s) will remain unlocked when the congregation is assembling for worship and other purposes?
- 4) Which doors within the building will remain locked during worship and other services to prohibit access to those parts of the building?

c. Decide whether the building should have an alarm system installed.

- 1) What kind of system fits your church's needs?
- 2) At what times should it be armed and who should do so?
- 3) Where should cameras be placed, inside and outside the building?
- d. Specify how many people, and specifically who, will be on guard *prior to and during* each worship service.
 - 1) Decide how guards will be obtained.
 - a) Will they be all volunteer?
 - b) Will one or more be hired?
 - c) Will one or some be in plain clothes and or in uniform?
 - 2) Specify when each guard person should arrive and how long after the worship service he or she should stay and watch over those who attend.
 - 3) Decide where each guard should be positioned.
 - a) Should any be outside? If so, where?
 - b) Where should the one(s) inside be positioned?
 - 4) Decide if one or more of the guards should be armed, and, if so, who, and does he, she, or they have the experience and legal permits necessary to carry and use arms?
 - 5) Decide whether access to the church building should be limited to passing through an electronic screening device monitored by a security officer.
 - 6) In countries where applicable, does each guard have readily available the contact information for the police department? (In many countries the police are supportive and helpful; in other countries, the police are an arm of hostile governments that try to prohibit or unacceptably control worship.)
 - 7) Decide if those who volunteer to be guards need any specific training. If so, who will do the training?
 - 8) Resources for training are wide-ranging. Several in the United States have resources available for churches throughout the world on the Internet. These resources contain many more helpful details and further information for the STF to consider and implement.
 - a) In the United States, the FBI is one source of training. Its [Website](#) states,

The FBI is committed to working with its partners to protect schools, workplaces, houses of worship, transportation centers, other public gathering sites, and communities.

Although local and state law enforcement agencies are virtually always the first ones on the scene, the FBI has played a large role in supporting the response to every major incident in recent years and has much to offer in terms of capacity, expertise, specialized capabilities, training, and resources before and after an incident occurs. The successful prevention of these active shooter incidents lies with a wide range of public and private entities all working together.

To that end, the FBI provides operational, behaviorally-based threat assessment and threat management services to help detect and prevent acts of targeted violence, helping academic, mental health, business, community, law enforcement, and government entities recognize and disrupt potential active shooters who may be on a trajectory toward violence. The Bureau also continues its research to identify indicators that could signal potential violent intent.

- [] b) The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), a federal agency within the U. S. Department of Homeland Security, has many [resources](#), including a Webinar, videos, and a downloadable [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship](#). This guide also includes helpful information on preparation for other threats and hazards, including, e.g., earthquake, fire, hurricane, tornado.
- [] e. Decide with the pastor how the congregation should be informed, and what specifically should be done, if an attack occurs.
- [] f. In countries where applicable, should the community police department, and/or other law enforcement personnel, be asked to patrol by the church building when people are gathered for worship?
- [] 5. Formulate a policy similar to other churches with such plans that includes a ban on, or examination of, any or all, but not limited to, the following:
 - [] a. Attaché cases
 - [] b. Backpacks

- c. Camera cases
 - d. Diaper bags
 - e. Shopping bags
 - f. Strollers
 - g. Cases supposedly for music instruments (e.g., guitar cases), unless the guards are informed by the music department of specifically who will be bringing instruments for the worship service. In such instances, will photo ID be required for everyone to eliminate embarrassment that some are not personally known to the guard(s)?
6. Decide if any of the following agencies need to be informed of your security plan? If so, who will make that or those contacts and by when?
- a. The church's attorney, or is any other legal advice needed?
 - b. The church's insurance company?
 - c. (In countries where applicable) the police?
7. Decide what funds are needed to implement the above plans.
- a. Are any funds already available? If so, by whom are they accessed? _____
 - b. What is the official procedure for requesting additional funds? _____