

A Guide to Celebrative Worship

In recent years, several studies have been published summarizing the impact of some general characteristics related to church growth and health. Books such as *Transformational Church* (Rainer), *Total Church Life* (Robinson), *Natural Church Development* (Schwarz), *Becoming a Healthy Church* (Macchia), and *Comeback Churches* (Stetzer), all include the renewal of worship as a major influence on church health, a catalyst for growth, and a key to breaking out of a long season of plateau. Words such as “celebrative”, “inspiring”, “God-exalting”, and “renewed” are some of the words used to describe worship in churches that have experienced renewal and growth.

In the book *Comeback Churches*, Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson devote a chapter to the influence of the corporate gathering and discuss the tremendous impact that worship and preaching had on a group of churches that turned around from steep decline to significant growth. They found that the following was true about the worship in these churches (*Comeback Churches*, 78-88):

- Worship was highly valued, done with excellence and designed to make an impact on the lives of all in attendance.
- Examining worship closely was key to the ability of a church to rediscover their passion for God and His mission.
- Although worship in “Comeback Churches” was largely more contemporary than traditional, churches worshiped in a variety of different styles.
- In any style, all of the churches led with excellence and worshiped with great participation and enthusiasm.

In this guide, the term “Celebrative Worship” will be used to describe worship that is done with excellence, leads people to enthusiastic participation, creates a sense of expectation, and results in people having life-transforming experiences with God. In addition, the following preliminary considerations should be noted.

The Time of the Worship Leader

Many churches have a volunteer that serves as the worship leader. The musical training, experience, and available time of these committed leaders varies and may affect the plan for leading worship. Part-time and Full-time worship leaders may be able to more fully engage in the process. In many cases, the suggestions given in this guide may need to be led by the pastor and a team of volunteers. In these cases, the Design Guide *Worship Planning for the Pastor* may be consulted as a supplemental resource and guide for leading a volunteer team through a process for revitalizing worship.

The Available Resources

Budget resources may affect the instruments, music resources, and other worship aids that are available. Personnel resources (people available to sing, play instruments, and provide other aspects of worship leadership) also vary greatly from church to church.

Current Make-up of Congregation

Demographic factors of the existing congregation may affect the worship leading strategy. More importantly, the profile of those desired to be reaching the community must be considered.

With these factors considered, use the following steps as a path to leading your church to revitalization through celebrative worship.

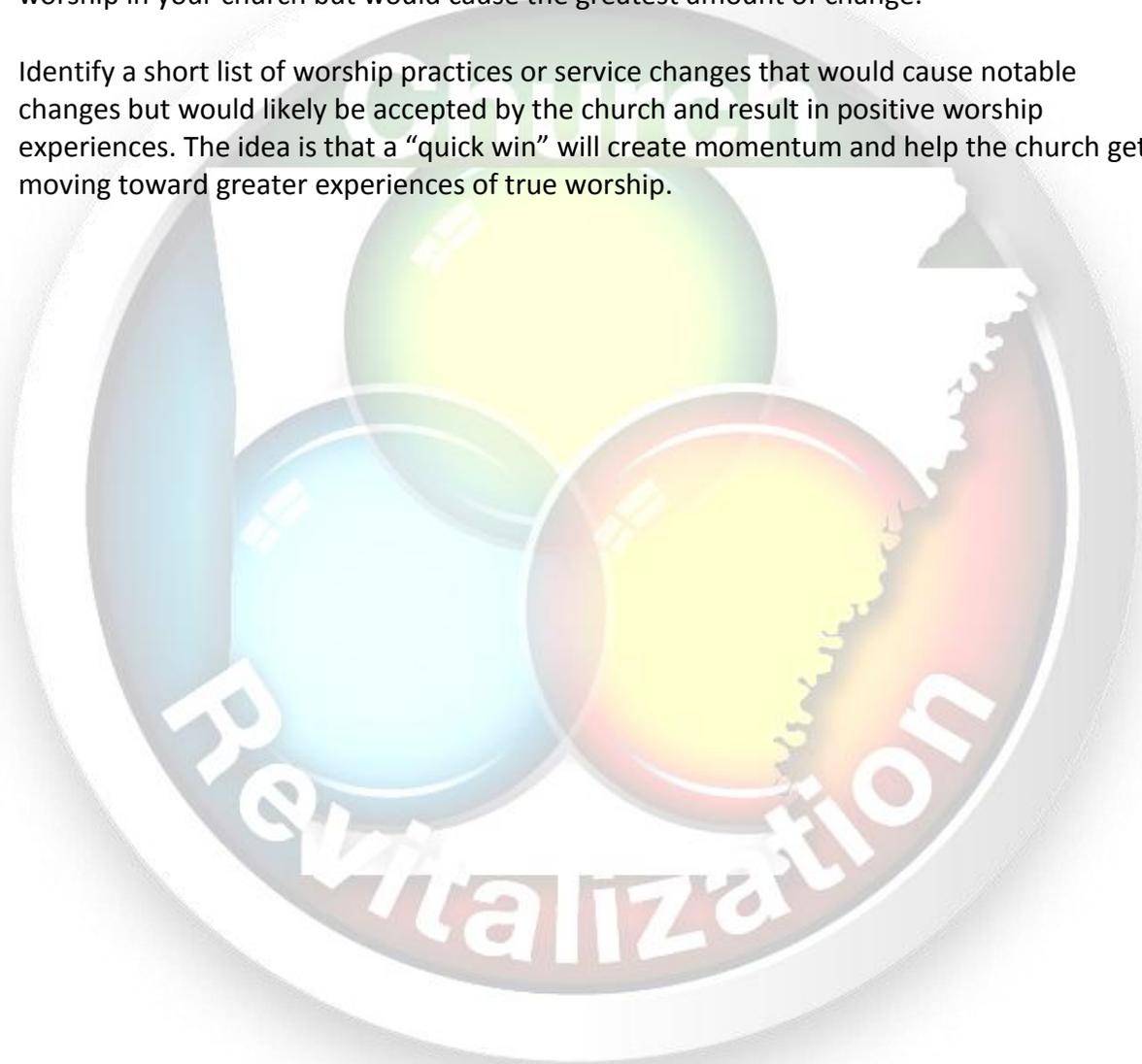
Level 1: Expand the Church's Understanding of and Vision for Biblical Worship

- Leaders may first begin with some personal searching for the answers to these foundational questions. Leaders must develop their own convictions regarding worship that will honor God and lead people to participation in an experience with God. What is your definition of worship?
- Engage in a study of Scripture with renewed focus on principles of true worship – practices found in Scripture, the preparation of people for worship, the responses of people to God, etc
Consult outside resources to determine how others have understood the subject. Have at least two conversations with other worship leaders who are refining their understanding of worship.
- Seek to understand the way people in your church most actively engage in worship through observation and conversations. Consider setting up conversation groups just to casually discuss views and definitions of what it means to experience worship. How would you describe your church's definition of worship? Are there differences between your own definition and the one held by most people in your church?
- Create a picture of the various people groups that need to be reached by the church in the community. What aspects of worship might especially help them connect to God in worship? What are some potential obstacles between the current practices of the church and people who need to be reached in the community?
- Work with the pastor to lead a series of services and sermons that challenge the church to understand and engage in biblical worship. This opportunity will enable the worship leader and the pastor to come to a unified understand of the principles of worship and the practices that the church will use to teach, lead, and evaluate worship experiences from week to week.

Level 2: Develop a Plan for Worship Ministry

- With principles for biblical worship established, the next step would be to consider how to implement the principles into the worship experience. Depending on the context of the church, this might be done in several ways:
 - Full time church worship leaders should seek to find a small group of other worship leaders who can meet together on a regular basis (perhaps monthly) and discuss strategies.
 - Part-time or Volunteer worship leaders should work with the associational missionary or a Minister of Music from an area church to hold an extended meeting (a weekday evening or Saturday morning) where ideas can be shared and training received.
 - Look for ABSC sponsored regional opportunities to participate in roundtable discussions and training conferences that discuss leading worship.
 - With so many churches offering video replays of worship services online, leaders can observe a variety of worship styles and practices from the comfort and convenience of home or office. Compatible practices and creative ideas can be noted.
- From the consultation and observation conducted above, compile a list of various worship practices, creative ideas, and other components. Consider utilizing a resource group from your congregation to focus on the priorities for worship in your church and discuss which items from the list would be most compatible with the congregation while still fulfilling already determined principles for worship.
- Evaluate past ministry practices. Collect copies of worship service bulletins/orders of service from the past 3-6 months. If possible, watch some previous worship services on video or through your church website.
 - What do you see that is most consistent with your principles for worship? Least consistent?
 - What aspects of the service do the best job of leading people to prepare to encounter God or focus more directly upon Him? Where are potential distraction points?
 - What has been the placement and role of prayer in the services?
 - What have been some of the visible responses to God from the people in your times of worship?
 - How much variety and creativity has been present in your worship services over the past 6 months? Does the order change in any significant way? New practices or elements introduced?
- Consider the list of worship practices that you compiled in the step above. What practices would do the best job of meetings some of the needs you identified in your evaluation of past worship services?

- Evaluate the available resources for worship leadership (people resources as well as material resources)
- Look for new possibilities of accessible worship resources: instruments, people, visual aids, song/music resources, etc.
- Create a priority list of action steps starting with those that will be most embraced by the church and leading up to practices that would represent the ideal experience of biblical worship in your church but would cause the greatest amount of change.
- Identify a short list of worship practices or service changes that would cause notable changes but would likely be accepted by the church and result in positive worship experiences. The idea is that a “quick win” will create momentum and help the church get moving toward greater experiences of true worship.



Level 3: Plan To Do Something Different in Worship in Your Church

- Plan services according to list of the priorities of worship from Level 2.
- As a worship planner and leader, determine to direct more of what happens in worship to God rather than about God. Address God directly in worship and lead people to direct their own praise and worship to Him.
- Create worship services with intentional, uninterrupted flow. Try to place parts of the service such as the welcome, announcements, etc. in a place in the service that is a natural fit and that does not awkwardly interrupt the flow of attention directed to God.
- Pay special attention to the prominence of prayer in the worship experience. Seek to incorporate a time for prayer in a place other than the “normal” slot in the order of worship. Consider creative ways to lead and involve people in prayer. Avoid treating prayer as a transitional “filler” to get to another part of the service.
- Work to create community with those who serve on the worship team. Take some time (even if it is brief) to go over the worship service, prayer together, and get everyone’s heart and mind united on the goal of the worship experience they are about to lead. Encourage and remind them to lead worship by being worshipers themselves.
- Although new songs will be a part of this experience, introduce them with care. Take time to “teach” a new song to the congregation through the choir, a small group, or a soloist. Invite the congregation to join after they have had the opportunity to hear it.
- As you plan worship experiences, look for opportunities to add variety in how you lead people to participate in worship each week.

“Non-Musical” Expressions of Worship

- Prayer Experiences
- Testimonies
- Scripture Readings
- Videos
- Use of dramatic sketches/monologues
- Times of silent reflection and preparation

The Environment for Worship

- Beginning service with a Guided Prayer Time
- Beginning the service by reading a celebratory Psalm
- Beginning the service with a video of a worship song
- Moving Announcement Times to other places in the order of service
- Involving different people/age groups in leading parts of the service

Using Technology in Worship

- Consider the use of projection for song lyrics and Scripture readings
- Discovering the use of moving backgrounds/scenes
- Incorporating video elements (testimonies, songs, etc)

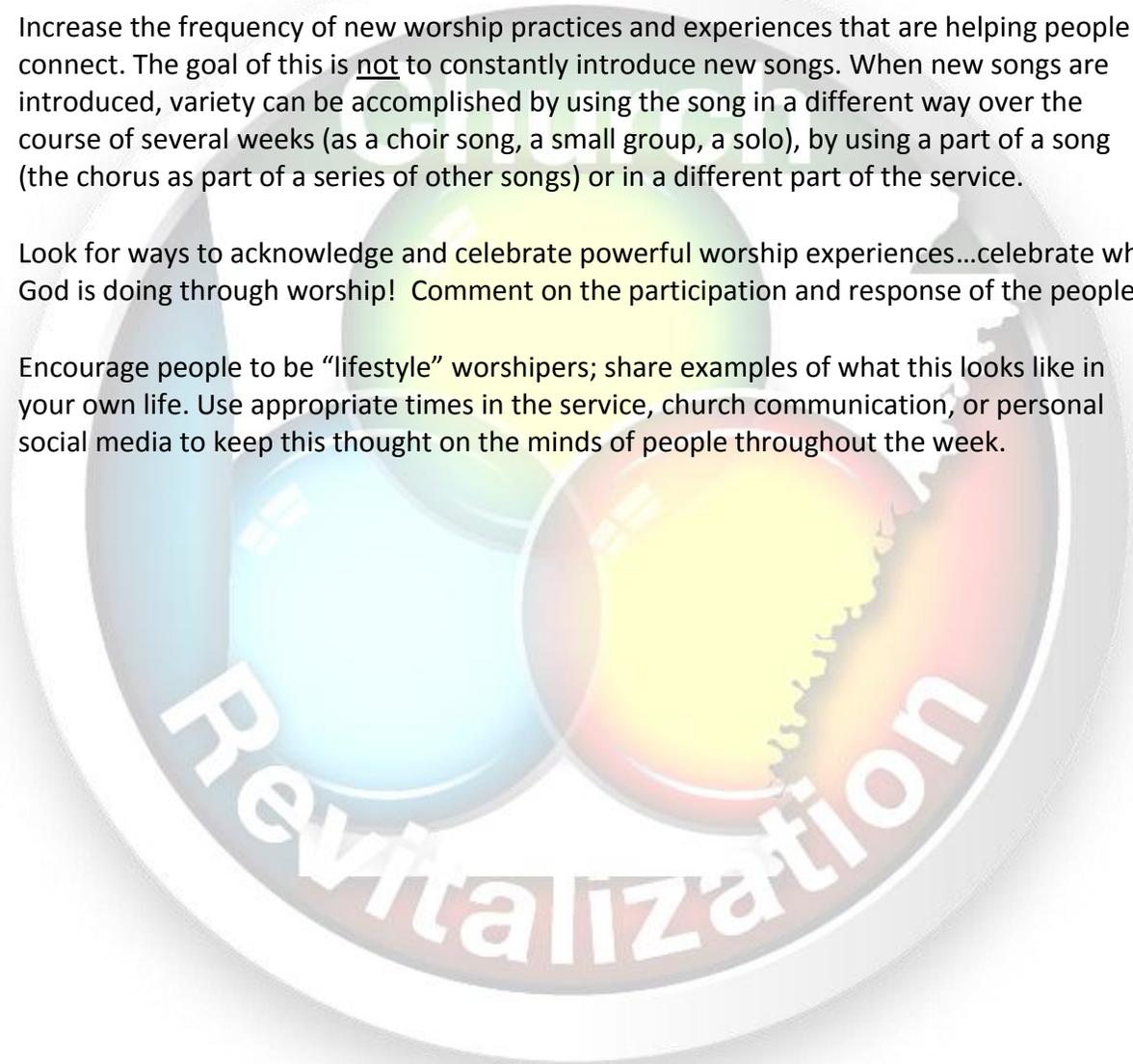
Using Testimonies in Worship

- Salvation testimonies of those who are candidates for baptism
- Testimonies of prayer experiences/answered prayers
- Testimonies of God's providence and deliverance
- Testimonies of restoration and hope
- Testimonies from those trusting God during difficult times
- Testimonies reporting from a recent church event, ministry/mission



Level 4: Seek and Celebrate Powerful Worship Experiences

- Continue to implement priority steps as identified by the pastor/staff and resource team.
- Continue to plan worship 1-3 months out with the pastor/staff and resource team.
- Increase the frequency of new worship practices and experiences that are helping people connect. The goal of this is not to constantly introduce new songs. When new songs are introduced, variety can be accomplished by using the song in a different way over the course of several weeks (as a choir song, a small group, a solo), by using a part of a song (the chorus as part of a series of other songs) or in a different part of the service.
- Look for ways to acknowledge and celebrate powerful worship experiences...celebrate what God is doing through worship! Comment on the participation and response of the people.
- Encourage people to be “lifestyle” worshipers; share examples of what this looks like in your own life. Use appropriate times in the service, church communication, or personal social media to keep this thought on the minds of people throughout the week.



Level 5: Celebrative, Participatory Worship

- As a church, embrace all aspects and practices of Biblical worship in unity. Embrace a mindset that rejects personal preference and seeks to enjoy the presence of God regardless of outside circumstances and external characteristics of the worship environment.
- Value various and creative ways to point people to Jesus through worship. Continue to focus attention on Him!
- Plan and lead worship services that continually pray, sing and direct attention to God through a variety of Biblical expressions of worship.

Additional Resources

- *Transformational Church* (Thom Rainer)
- *Whatever Happened to Worship* (A.W. Tozer)
- *Return to Worship* (Ron Owens)

