

Worship Planning for the Pastor

In many churches, worship services are led by a part-time or volunteer person. This person may be highly devoted but find it difficult to put in the time and find the resources needed to increase the level of participation and celebration in the corporate worship experience. In these cases, the pastor can take a more active and strategic role in revitalizing worship. Ultimately, the pastor should be the “lead worshiper” in the church.

Level 1: Lead the Church to Clarity on a Definition and Description of Worship

Worship is an act that is deeply personal. A person’s background, prior church experience, salvation experience, personal daily walk with Christ, depth of theological understanding, experience with prayer, and even non-spiritual characteristics such as preferences for musical style all can have an effect on what they perceive should happen in the context of a worship service. In order to lead the church to worship experiences that focus on anticipating, celebrating, and responding to God, a biblical understanding of worship is needed.

Worship “principles” are intentionally broad widely applicable. The point here is not to agree upon what type of songs will be song, what instruments will be played, what technology will be used, or what will be worn on the platform. The principles found and affirmed by the church will form the foundation against which all other aspects of the gathering for worship may be tested.

- 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.
- Spend time with key leaders evaluating the foundational principles of worship (a series of Deacons’ meetings, a short term Wednesday night Bible study, a special extended period of time set aside, etc.).
- Agree as a leadership body that these principles will guide how worship is led in the church.
- Preach a series of messages to the church that communicate the principles of worship.
- Commit to seeking powerful experiences in worship as an essential part of your church’s mission.

Level 2: Meet with Worship Leader Staff & Volunteers (Song leaders, instrumentalists, regular singers)

A worship planning team, at least in the beginning stages of worship revitalization, will be an important help to the pastor. Staff or volunteer worship leaders will have valuable insight into how people participate in different aspects of the service, what an anticipated response might be to different practices of worship, and how implementing certain changes would affect practical or technical aspects of the service. The pastor may also wish to include some who are not involved in leading worship in the church, but who can provide a mature perspective on worship that will honor God, engage people, and be true to the Biblical principles.

- Enlist the worship leader and other people who are regularly involved in leading/planning worship in the church.
- Gather the past 3 months of worship service bulletins/orders of service and evaluate them together as a Worship Planning Team.
- Consider these questions for discussion:
 - Which of our principles for worship are we following well? Which need the most attention?
 - How much time in the service is given each week to prayer and helping people to prepare to encounter God?
 - What is the level of participation by people through singing? What are factors that affect this?
 - How much of our song selection are songs that sing “about God” vs. songs that lead us to sing “to God”? Does this affect participation and the spirit of our services?
 - What are some ruts that we may have fallen into in our worship services? (things that we do out of habit but may no longer fit our direction/purpose)
 - Can you think of a something from a previous worship service that was out of the ordinary but especially powerful or significant? Why was it so memorable? What should we learn from this?
- Share ideas for possible adjustments, change in order, and new aspects of the worship service
- Create a priority list of action steps – list items from least intense to most intense change for the congregation (Note: the pastor may wish to consult the document “Intensity vs. Impact” for a more complete discussion on this point).

Level 3: Plan and Lead a Series of Worship Services

Revitalizing worship ultimately involves engaging in different worship practices that lead people to greater participation and deeper experiences with God. In order for different worship outcomes to take place, people must worship differently! The use of the worship planning team in this step will be valuable as the team draws from various resources, backgrounds, and perspectives to assemble different options for musical selections, prayer experiences, and other aspects of the service.

- With the Worship Planning Team, work to plan one month of Sunday morning services.
- Use your priority list of actions steps to focus on one noticeable change in some aspect of the worship service and be consistent with it for the first month.
- Select songs and consider an order of worship that will help people direct attention to God and encourage participation.
- In addition, commit to engaging in prayer in some way that is different from the usual practice either just before or during the worship service.
- Commit to the entire month of worship services and make no adjustments unless something glaringly obvious becomes apparent and the worship planning team is in agreement on the change.
- Churches may also use additional opportunities for worship – Sunday night, Wednesday night, or special services – to introduce the congregation to an experience of worship that may be new. These opportunities may help some congregations to receive the change easier than if revealed for the first time on a Sunday morning.
- Depending on the response from the congregation, plan another month of services that are similar to the previous month. Continue to lead people to a more personal and participatory experience.

Level 4: Continue to Increase Variety in the Worship Experience

Any musical style, order of service, or activity and worship can become routine if practiced week after week. One purpose of revitalization in worship is to lead the church to seek to encounter God through a variety of biblical experiences. Increasing variety will encourage people to seek God for Who He is and not only in a certain context or through a style.

- Work with the Worship Planning Team to continue planning services 2-4 weeks in advance.
- Continue to address items from the priority list of action steps created in Level 2.
- 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

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 5: Ongoing Celebrative, Participatory Worship

- Worship Planning Team continues to work to plan worship services that focus on biblical principles for worship and varied experiences.
- Work to engage different people in worship leadership and seek varied experiences.

Additional Resources

- *Transformational Church* (Thom Rainer)
- *Whatever Happened to Worship* (A.W. Tozer)
- *Return to Worship* (Ron Owens)
- *Worship Matters* (Bob Kauflin)
- *Worship Is a Verb* (Robert Webber)
- *Hungry for Worship* (Lavon Gray)
- www.LifewayWorship.com
- Planning Center Online (fee-based subscription service to assist with service planning)

