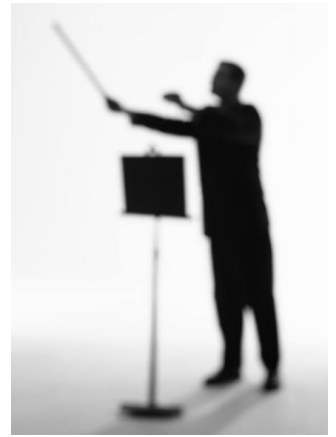


Leading Church

Preparing God's people to meet with God: to hear him in his Word, and to respond to him



Colossians 3:12-17

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Ephesians 5:19-20

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, {20} always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

Psalms 66:1-6

Shout with joy to God, all the earth! {2} Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! {3} Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. {4} All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name." Selah {5} Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf! {6} He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot-- come, let us rejoice in him.

Psalms 71:19-24

Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have done great things. Who, O God, is like you? {20} Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. {21} You will increase my honor and comfort me once again. {22} I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praise to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. {23} My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you-- I, whom you have redeemed. {24} My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long, for those who wanted to harm me have been put to shame and confusion.



Investigate

1. Read **Colossians 3:12-17**. What should God's people clothe themselves with (verse 12)?

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2. What should rule in our hearts and why (verse 15)?
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3. When should the word of Christ dwell in us richly (verse 16)?
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4. Who is your attention to be directed towards (16)?
-
5. Whatever we do, what should be happening as we meet together (verse 17)?
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To Think About:

6. What are some implications of this for the way we lead church ...for regulars?

...for newcomers?

7. Who does **Eph 5:19-20** encourage us to direct our attention towards as we meet?
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8. Read **Psalms 66:1-6** and **70:19-24**. Who are these passages directed towards, or focussed on?
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1. What is Church?

"Church" is not a building. The word that we translate as "church" means "gathering". In the New Testament it mostly refers to the group of God's people who gather together, or who God has gathered together.

Church doesn't begin when the leader says 'Good morning everyone', and finish with the last song. Church begins when the first two people arrive and finishes when the last two leave. Church doesn't stop for five minutes during the break. It is impossible to be too early for church (unless you're the first person there). Setting up and packing away, serving morning tea and supper are also important parts of church.

In this paper, church mostly refers to the CHURCH SERVICE - that is the formal part of our meeting. Eg "leading church" is short-hand for "leading the church service".

Who is church for?

Church is for Christians. This might seem like an obvious thing to say, but it make a big difference to the way we do things!

Don't misunderstand me! Church should be inclusive, welcoming and understandable to outsiders, but it is primarily a gathering for God's people. The trick is to EXPLAIN what Christians do at church, rather than REMOVE the things (such as singing or praying) that non-Christians may feel unfamiliar with. WILLOW CREEK (a church in America) is famous for its Sunday "Seeker Services". These are "church services" aimed at non-Christians (seekers). There is little singing, but plenty of snappy audio-visual and drama presentations, and short, relevant talks. Yet even at Willow Creek, these services are not intended to be the main meeting for Christians. They meet mid-week for a more "normal" service.

2. Church is directed towards God

God has called us to direct our thanks, praise, and adoration to him. He called Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness SO THAT THEY MAY WORSHIP HIM (Ex 7:16). **To worship God is to acknowledge his worth-ship.**

God doesn't call us to worship him because he NEEDS it, but because he is WORTHY of it. The twenty-four elders in heaven fall down before God's throne and cast their crowns before him singing, (Rev 4:11 NIV) "You are **worthy**, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

We should rejoice that it is RIGHT for God to seek his own honour, and be jealous for his own honour, for he, infinitely more than anything he has made, is WORTHY of honour. When we feel the absolute RIGHTNESS of this, we then have the appropriate heart attitude for genuine worship. We, like the rest of his creation, have been made for this very purpose.

A "Service of Worship"?

This phrase is often used to describe the church meeting. Sometimes, slightly more accurately, it is called a "corporate service of worship". But a service of worship is far broader than the time we spend together on Sunday morning. Our whole lives are to offered in view of God's mercies as reasonable, or acceptable, acts of worship (Romans 12:1-2).

Language is important. Calling our meeting "a service of worship" can encourage the mistake that God is only interested in what we do on Sunday mornings, and minimise the significance of a whole life lived for God's honour.

While this is true, there is a sense in which the church service gives us the opportunity to focus on God TO A GREATER EXTENT. It is easy, on our own (as easily-distracted sinners) to lose an awareness of God. This means an important part of the leader's job is to draw people to focus their attention on God.

As we join with others in song, prayer, reflection, reading of the Bible, and hearing it taught, we are reminded of who He is, and we experience again the wonder of the glorious, transcendent, sovereign, holy, faithful, loving, compassionate God who chooses us in Jesus. **The encouragement of others** helps us to worship. Their prayers remind us of characteristics of God we've forgotten, and of sin we need to repent of. The enthusiasm of their singing encourages us to consider God's goodness afresh. Their attentiveness during the talk reminds us of the importance of the lessons being taught.

The Church Meeting

Traditionally, the church meeting has been designed around three elements;

1. **We approach God:** God is everywhere, so there is a sense in which we are always in his presence. But as sinful, easily-distracted people, we need to consciously and deliberately focus our attention on God. This can be called **approaching** God. We do this by prayer and song, using Scripture to help focus our minds on Him. Your job as leader is to help people give their full attention to the majesty of God. It is not to introduce the topic, passage or speaker (in isolation from God), to be funny, or to draw attention to yourself. It is to jolt people from their self-obsession and distraction and to encourage them to fix their thoughts on the saving, loving, communicating God of the Bible.

2. **We hear God speak:** We do this through reading the Bible, and hearing it explained. This should be the climax of the service. Your job as leader is to set up the service so that people can give this part their best attention.

3. **We respond to God:** We do this by singing, prayer, reflection etc, (and perhaps even by collection). Your job as leader is to give people the opportunity to



Ashfield Presbyterian Church

Conducting services of worship
all over the place,
by all sorts of people,
24/7

Romans 12:1

A Typical Service

Introduction	} Approach
Prayer	
Songs	
Announcements	
Song	
Kids Talk	
Song Prayer	
Bible Reading	} Hear
Bible Talk	
Prayer	} Respond
Song	
Close	

allow God's Spirit to do his work of conviction and enlightenment. Sometimes you do this best by highlighting the strong points of application, sometimes by giving people the space to think it through for themselves.

This isn't a model that has to be followed rigidly, but it's a good basis to start from!

- Therefore, Church needs to be God-honouring

Since God is the object of our attention during church, it is vital that everything we do in church is designed, and carried out, to be God-honouring. It should not call attention to ourselves or bring glory to ourselves, but call attention to God, and cause people to think about him. Does each part of our church service - even the announcements and collection - bring glory to God in the way they are done?

3. Church is Directed Towards Each Other:

As a result of Jesus' work for us on the cross, the writer to the Hebrews encourages us to draw near to God with confidence. He also exhorts us to continue meeting together, and to spur one another on towards love and good deeds. This encouragement happens when we address each other in speech or song, but also as we address God in prayer or song.

Does a Christian have to go to church? No, but meeting with God's people encourages us to continue living as Christians.



(Hebrews 10:19-25 NIV) Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, {20} by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, {21} and since we have a great priest over the house of God, {22} let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. {23} Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. {24} And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. {25} Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

- Therefore Church needs to be UNDERSTANDABLE

Since church is also directed towards each other, it is vital that everything we do at church is understandable.

Explain what you are doing. Everyone needs to understand what's going on - even people who've never been before. There's nothing more discouraging than being 'left out' in a group activity by not understanding what's going on - eg in some churches everyone stands up at certain times without being told, or sings a 'doxology' without being told. How would YOU feel in this situation?

At the same time, resist the temptation to preach a series of mini-sermons. They can detract from the main talk. Make sure what you DO SAY reinforces the key idea of the talk. If the talk is clear, it shouldn't need you to add much AFTER it.

The Bible reading should be close to the talk. This will mean that it is fresh in people's minds as they listen to the talk. Make sure you or the reader gives the reading and the page number, and that enough time is given for people to find it.

Can people see and hear? Nothing hampers clarity and edification more than not being able to hear and see. Especially when we are singing, keep the words in the top half of the screen. Make sure you are close to the microphone, and speak clearly into it. Don't start speaking before you arrive at the mike, and don't move away until you are finished.



What's the Big Idea?

There's a well argued case that most people are only really capable of walking away from a sermon carrying one central theme. If the preacher doesn't give one, then the listener will make one up for themselves. No matter how hard the preacher might try to get five separate points across in a talk, generally when asked what the talk was about, a member of the congregation will convey the single concept they took out of the talk.

At church we try to cater for the listener by preparing messages that convey one big biblical concept or one Big Idea, that will be clear and challenging to all who listen. To take it even further still, not

just the sermon but the entire church service should be shaped around expressing that biblical concept, to try and ensure the seed of God's word is firmly implanted in the heart of the listener. This means:

- ◆ the **preacher**: needs to convey the big idea to everyone involved in the service
- ◆ the **leader**: needs to point towards the big idea with everything they say
- ◆ the **musicians**: need to be playing songs that convey the biblical concept being taught
- ◆ the **singers**: need to sing the words meaningfully, modeling understanding of the big idea
- ◆ the **audio person**: needs to ensure the message is audibly delivered to the congregation
- ◆ the **prayer**: should be in response to the concept God's word is teaching

Communication between all involved, therefore, will be vital. All of this going well, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the seed of God's living word will be sown in the hearts of the congregation!!

4. Church is **IMPORTANT**

Praising God and encouraging each other are two of the most important things we can ever do. Church is important! We are at the centre of God's purposes for his people when we meet to worship him. Be convinced that your job as leader of the church service is a highly significant one.



Be enthusiastic.

Don't act like what we are doing is unimportant. Even what you wear conveys how important you think church is. You don't need to **OVERDRESS**, but be appropriate. A good rule of thumb is to be slightly better dressed than the average person attending.

Make sure you are engaged in every part of the meeting; by participating in the singing, looking up and following the bible reading etc. Don't 'drop out' to talk to someone or organise what's happening next.

Be organised.

Being friendly and informal is not the same thing as being sloppy. When the leader is disorganised, it makes people feel tense. More importantly, it conveys to people that what's happening is unimportant. When church is disorganised there are long gaps when nothing is happening. This makes it boring and it becomes harder to concentrate.

Be definite and deliberate in the way you lead. Have your plan for the meeting handy so you always know what's happening next. Keep it in your hand the whole time so you don't lose it. It's a good idea to plan even the details of how you will introduce songs.

It's especially important that the **START** of the service is smooth. Write out your introduction word for word. This sets the tone for how people approach the meeting. Remind people of why they're there. Focus their attention on God, and his goodness. Snap them out of the complacency and busy-ness which they bring with them to church.



At the same time as being organised, be sensitive to significant moments. Sometimes what you have prepared may be inappropriate. For example, if a song has seemed to have especially struck the congregation, rather than launch into the announcements, it might be appropriate to pray briefly, or simply note, "Wasn't that a great song to express our thanks to God?" If you depart from your script, always be brief.



Be energising.

The leader sets the level of **ENERGY** in the meeting. Good leading energises the group, and creates a sense of anticipation for the teaching of God's word. Being too 'laid back' can drain the energy. Keep things flowing, convey a feeling that the meeting is 'heading somewhere' and that you know where that is.

Be simple.

Don't feel you have to be clever or say something tremendously profound at every point. Don't aim to do several new things all on the same week. The best leader is the one we don't notice - aim for people to leave saying, "Haven't we got a marvelous God?!", rather than "Didn't Fred lead cleverly?"

5. **Public prayer**

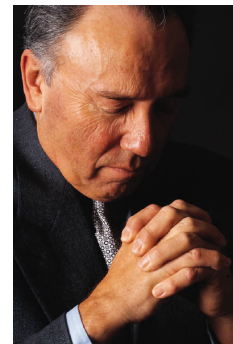
Praying is important! Work hard to do it well - God deserves it! Don't introduce prayer with "We're

JUST going to pray” - it’s much more important than that! Invite people to pray with you. “Please join with me in prayer” “Let’s talk to the God who made us”.

Be clear.

Public prayers need more work because they need to be clear enough for others to follow. People must be able to follow the line of your thoughts so they can say a loud ‘Amen’. Keep your ideas clear, your sentences short, and your words simple.

You are praying for the benefit of others, so make sure they can hear you! Speak loudly and clearly into the microphone. Don’t bow your head, head-butt the microphone, and mumble into your belly-button. Don’t pray a prayer for the church community using “I”. This is not your prayer time, it’s ours. You are leading us in prayer.



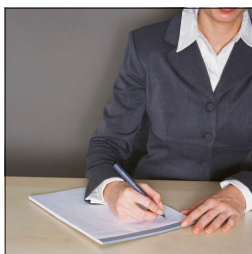
Speak naturally. Don’t bung on a soft, breathy, or spiritual voice. No weird ministers’ voices! Don’t use big spiritual words that you wouldn’t normally use.

Remember to address God, not the congregation. It’s odd how often you’ll hear people pray, “We thank you for God’s word” rather than “we thank you for YOUR word”.

Don’t make prayer into announcements. “We pray for Mary, who fell off the ladder while she was trimming her trees. And she’s in St Mary’s hospital in Ward 6, and visiting hours are between 6 and 8 pm.” If the congregation needs information, tell them BEFORE you start praying. God already knows.

Be brief.

If we want people to stay with us, our prayers in church should not be too long. If they are over three minutes long, they had better be good God-honouring prayers, or you will lose peoples’ attention!



Be prepared.

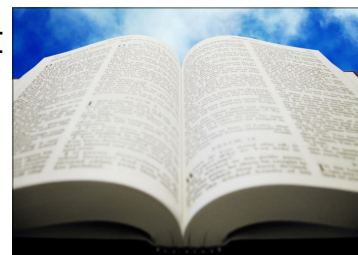
Write out your prayers. If you don’t write them out (or at least have detailed points written out) your prayers will be harder to listen to and may very well ramble on too long. There is a good chance they will also be vague and full of churchy clichés. Writing out also helps you to organise your thoughts, and to know how to start and finish. Our prayers should never be boring, or so clever that they draw attention to us. Remember, written prayers are no less from the heart, and no less spiritual, than prayers off the top of your head.

Don’t pray “Lord, we just wanna, Lord, just thank you Lord, because we just really wanna say ...” this is boring and shows a lack of preparation. It won’t help your brothers and sisters to concentrate.

Pray biblically.

It is important to form our prayers on the priorities of God, rather than our own. The best way to do this is to base your prayer on a passage of the bible. Don’t pray the passage word for word, but take three or four ideas and base your prayer on them. The Psalms are a great resource.

Your prayer should remind us that we are addressing the God of the Universe. It should not be too “buddy-buddy”, or just rattling off a list of needs. Although God hears all the prayers of his children, a helpful way to make sure WE keep the right attitude to prayer is to use the formula A.C.T.S. This stands for *Adoration* (praising God for who he is and what he’s done), *Confession* (recognising and repenting of the things we’ve done wrong), *Thanksgiving* (thanking God for how he treats us), and *Supplication* (asking God for the things we need)



We can address God in various ways to bring out different aspects of his character - “The One who created all things with a word”, or “The Father who loves us so much he sent his Son”. When praying about someone who is distressed we can pray to “the God of all comfort”. When praying about evangelism, addressing our Lord as “the light of the world” will help concentrate our thoughts.

If we have just sung a song based on a particular passage, pray on that. If you are praying after the talk, pray in response to God’s word. Praise God for what the passage teaches us about himself. Thank him for what it says about what he’s done, or promised to do. Ask God to make us what the passage says we should be, or should be striving to be.

Pray, don’t preach. If you have a gripe, or a new idea, or hobby-horse, don’t pray it, talk to the leaders about it.



6. The Place of Music

(Colossians 3:16 NIV) *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*



Investigate:

Look at the verse above. Why do we sing in church?

1. **We sing to each other:** teaching/ reminding/ encouraging and challenging each other of God's truth. Bible verses and ideas in songs are easily remembered later.
2. **We sing to God:** Songs are a powerful vehicle for expressing our gratitude for what God has done, our praise to him for who he is, and for confessing our sin.

Praise and Worship?:

To refer to singing as the "Praise and Worship time" is misleading and unbiblical. Singing is just one part of a LIFE of praise and worship. To refer to "praise" as singing a certain type of celebratory song isn't biblical. We can be tempted to think that unless we FEEL a certain way, we haven't properly worshipped.

"Praise" in the bible is declaring what God is like and what he has done in saving us. It seems to be telling others about God as much as it is speaking to God.

The Power of Music:

God designed music as a powerful tool. It can stir the emotions in a way that straight speech cannot. We need to make sure that we sing songs about the character and actions of God. These are the songs which TRULY stir our emotions. At the same time we need to be careful that we don't MANIPULATE people by MISUSING this gift. Many songs focus on our response, or our emotions, rather than on the truths of God. Such subjectivism and self-centredness misuses music.

Using Music Powerfully:

Use words that teach: Don't pick songs simply because they are enjoyable to sing, or have a catchy tune.

Help people understand what they are doing and why they are doing it. Explain that we are singing to each other, or to God. Clarify words or ideas that people might not understand. Use introductions like "Let's remind each other of God's great love for us by singing ...", or "Let's praise God in the words of this song..." Keep intros short. We don't need a little sermon before each song.

It's not a performance. In serving the congregation, the leader/ singer/ musician must be prepared to decrease so that Christ can increase. This means not drawing attention to himself, but to be as humble and inconspicuous as possible. We need GOOD QUALITY musicians with clear directions from the leader - not to impress people, but to make it easy for them to join in and sing.

Be appropriate. At different stages of the meeting, ask yourself "What atmosphere is appropriate at this point?" A loud, joyful song that reminds us that it's good to be together at the START of the meeting? A REFLECTIVE song leading into prayer? A song that reinforces the key idea after the talk?

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, pray about the whole service. Ask God for wisdom and help as you lead. Pray for each person involved in leading that they might decrease and Christ might increase. Pray for each member of the congregation that they may give God the praise and thanks that he deserves.

The Difference Between Hymns And Praise Choruses

An old farmer went to the city one weekend and attended the big city church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was.

"Well," said the farmer. "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns."

"Praise choruses?" asked the wife. "What are those?"

"Oh, they're okay. They're sort of like hymns, only different," said the farmer.

"Well, what's the difference?" asked the wife.

The farmer said, "Well it's like this ... If I were to say to you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' well that would be a hymn. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you,

'Martha, Martha, Martha, Oh, Martha, MARTHA, MARTHA, the cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the black and white cows, the COWS, COWS, COWS are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, in the CORN, CORN, CORN, COOOORRRRRNNNNN,' then, if I were to repeat the whole thing two or three times, well that would be a praise chorus."

As luck would have it, the exact same Sunday a young, new Christian from the city church attended the small town church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was.

"Well," said the young man, "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang hymns instead of regular songs."

"Hymns?" asked the wife. "What are those?"

"They're okay. They're sort of like regular songs, only different," said the young man.

"Well, what's the difference?" asked the wife.

The young man said, "Well it's like this ... If I were to say to you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' well that would be a regular song. If on the other hand, I were to say to you,

1. 'Oh Martha, dear Martha, hear thou my cry
Inclined thine ear to the words of my mouth.
Turn thou thy whole wondrous ear by and by
To the righteous, glorious truth.
2. 'For the way of the animals who can explain
There in their heads is no shadow of sense,
Hearkenest they in God's sun or his rain
Unless from the mild, tempting corn they are
fenced.
3. 'Yea those cows in glad bovine, rebellious
delight,
Have broke free their shackles, their warm
pens eschewed.
Then goaded by minions of darkness and night
They all my mild Chilliwack sweet corn
chewed.
4. 'So look to that bright shining day by and by,
Where all foul corruptions of earth are reborn
Where no vicious animal makes my soul cry
And I no longer see those foul cows in the
corn.'

Then, if I were to do only verses one, three and four, and change keys on the last verse, well that would be a hymn."