

# **Crafting Flow in Worship**

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Music connects with our emotions and inner spirit like nothing else. Some of our deepest and most life-changing spiritual experiences have been during times of worship with the family of believers. It is this corporate worship about which I wish to share some thoughts and hopefully help you, as worship leader or worship lover, to be inspired to move beyond the restraints of habit or tradition and initiate creative, passionate times of worship for your churches.

Biblically, we have solid principals to guide us as we craft weekly times of worship. Under the Old Covenant, temple worship exhibited purposeful order, attention to detail, and creative expression as building blocks of worship that God designed. Our human tendency is to canonize and ritualize acts and styles of worship, which results in a more consistent yet less meaningful assembly. This tendency inevitably steals the emotion and drains the passion that our spirits instinctively draw from to express worship. In fact, if we honestly observe our current practice of worship patterns, we may find that they are no different than most protestant-birther churches in terms of the main elements that comprise the one to two hours of time when the church is meeting together. Of course there is nothing wrong with pattern in and of itself, but in that setting, we often feel uninspired and dull and wonder, “Where is the heart”? Let’s explore a few ideas that may stretch our thinking and hopefully guide our efforts as we struggle each week to “compose” or craft an effective and powerful worship time. The focus of these thoughts will center on “creating a flow” to our worship.

At the outset, we quickly learn that “flow” in our times of worship doesn’t happen on its own. With insightful, creative effort, a worship leader can learn to craft sensitive and powerful times week after week that help us connect with our God and experience His presence.

## **A Biblical Base**

Scriptures that give insight and concepts for worship abound! In my view, we have great latitude in planning our times of corporate worship. Of course, we must be united with our elders and evangelist, but a team approach to planning and executing is always the most powerful.

From John 4, we know the account of Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman at the well. As they talked, the woman reveals that her view of worship is focused on exterior concerns, like the right ‘place’ to worship, whereas Jesus points her back to her heart and what her daily life – explaining those are what God was more concerned about. “...True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.”

Often we fall into particular patterns of worship because “that’s how we’ve always done it.” In 2 Kings 21:19-22, Amon, a 22 year old king, imitated his father’s actions in worship, but imitated these actions right into disobedience.

*He followed completely the ways of his father, worshiping the idols his father had worshiped, and bowing down to them. He forsook the LORD, the God of his ancestors, and did not walk in obedience to him.*

If we simply imitate the worship of those who have come before us and do not study, explore, and invest initiative (and most of all, heart), our worship so easily becomes a mindless order of religious form with little or no heart. The same was true with Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33.

*He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.*

It is ‘easy’ to default to an approach toward worship that is based on external issues and concerns or one where we simply follow “The way we’ve always done it” – the traditions of men.

My favorite passage that I return to time after time, and that draws me to God and focuses my mind and heart on the essential motivation for worship, is Hebrews 9-12. I wish every worship leader would study and meditate on these chapters as a foundational place from which to plan and execute their worship times. I often think of Sundays as the church’s big quiet time with our Father and Creator. The message of these verses helps me to craft an atmosphere and attitude of wonderment for our God and His immense incredibleness, helping us to focus on God, not man.

I imagine Sundays as a time the whole church comes together to share in remembering Jesus through the Lord’s Supper; we sing together; pray together; hear scripture readings without personal explanations or comments; hear the testimony of a brother or sister or combinations; and use any medium available

to proclaim what an amazing God we serve and worship. I want to be reminded of how great my God is; how he still loves me, no matter what I’ve done; that I am forgiven; that my family loves me and I love them. Just imagine how we would all feel leaving those times! Personally, I would prefer to leave any announcements, commendations, reporting, or even big admonishments to the church for a midweek time so that Sunday could be all about our Father.

### **Principals for Crafting Powerful Worship Times**

- Understand that it takes great effort and passion to accomplish a great Sunday worship.
- Build a unified conviction about the immense importance and place of

worship for the local body of believers and the effort needed for it to connect powerfully.

- Set this as the weekly objective: to compose a time of worship that elevates us from the worldly struggles and focuses of modern life, to the very presence of God and his church.
- Build and utilize a small team with differing gifts and insights to compile these times. The two main people responsible are the worship leader and an evangelist or elder.
- Divide and Conquer – you can't do everything great at first. Figure out your strengths and work them. Work on building the different parts: band, chorus, technology, and church singing.
- Get input from the church (teens, campus, older, etc) and continue to evolve.

View a time of worship as “one thing,” not a series of things. Just like the body of Christ – “though its parts are many, they form one body.” When we look at a wedding cake, we see it as one thing, but it is made up of many ingredients and they are skillfully added in specific proportions, mixed in a certain way, heated specifically; afterwards, the individual parts are combined and assembled. All this preparation is to create a moment of heavenly experience to your taste buds. In the same way, a movie, play, opera, story, novel, symphony, or song, are all “one” thing, but have many parts.

In the same way, a worship time should be seen as “one” thing, made up of many parts. Every part must have a purpose and reason for being there that supports the main idea. Then all these parts must be combined in a timeline and purposeful order that flows and takes the congregation to a destination. The usual “parts” of our worship services are: The Lord’s Supper, Songs, Scripture Reading, Sermon, Sharing, Collection and Announcements. This is neither an exhaustive list, nor are all of these pieces necessary at every service. The attention we give to purposefully selecting, organizing, and transitioning each of these “parts” will make the difference between the church being moved and focused solely on God or simply sitting through an accepted tradition of expected (even required) parts that may or may not even be related to each other. **Flow is a thread that not only holds the garment together, but it is the theme and even conduit that will foster and enhance an emotional connection to the Father during a time of corporate worship.**

### **Conceptual Flow**

How sensitive are we to progressing and advancing one part of worship into the next? How much thought do we put into how one part connects to another part? Consider these questions:

- How do we move from song to song?
- How do we move OUT of one song and into the next?
- How do we flow from a song into a sermon, or out of a sermon into a song?

## Practical Considerations

- Eliminate or at least minimize distractions.
- Too many people parading on stage tends to make it about us, not God
- A person who says something should think of what was just “said” or sung, etc., then say something related to that thing as an introduction to what he has to say.
- Lyric projection must be coordinated with the performance – it is very distracting when they get out of sync .
- Video backgrounds – use sparingly prior to worship OR after/during Meditation time.
- At midweek, teach the church about Sunday “behavior”; for example, avoid unnecessary entrances and exits, etc.
- Minimize people moving around.... like an usher counting (always distracting)
- Singers and musicians entering and exiting stage — keep movement minimal and be consistent
- Work on song transitions. Use the song “KEYS” skillfully. For example, the I (one) chord of a song can smoothly become the V (five) chord of a new key to the next song. You can move up a half step or a whole step to build intensity. With hymns, try dropping the key for a verse then back up.
- Learn to have good “ALL IN” starts and stops with songs (no one sneaking in).
- Be consistent with moods.
- Have a destination in mind and a plan to get there.
- Use both horizontal AND vertical songs but understand why and where to use each in worship. Practice developing thematic worship. Examples:
  - Crucified & Risen Christ
  - God’s Holiness
  - Forgiveness
- Use scripture readings to interject between songs that tie them together or that help transition from one theme or song to the next.
- Try using metaphor like a JOURNEY to help you build flow.
- Think through your point of entrance, where you want to go, and where you end up – you are basically assembling the beginning, the middle and the end of a worship that flows.

As we approach worship planning time, we should always remember that we are free in Christ to learn and grow in our expression of our love and praise. Our continual challenge is serving with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength instead of the comfort of tradition.