



Gospel Light Worship Service Philosophy

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the philosophy of our worship services, in particular with regards to preaching and singing.

1.0 Purpose of worship service

The worship service is a gathering of the church for the purpose of glorifying God in response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Worship services involve scripture reading, preaching, singing, praying and taking of the Lord's Supper.

2.0 Principles of worship service (general)

2.1 God

Worship must be focused on God, that is, it must be all about God and for God (Revelation 4:11, Matthew 4:10). This means that worship services must help people know God (Nehemiah 8:5-8) via His Word. Worship services must also bring praise and honour to Him (Psalms 66:2). There must be reverence (Ecclesiastes 5:1-4, Hebrews 12:28) and order (1 Corinthians 14:33,40) in worship services.

2.2 Gospel

We worship God because of the Gospel. The Gospel is the good news of our holy God sending his Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross and rise from the dead to save us from our sins and reconcile us to himself. Because of God's undeserved goodness towards us, we can worship Him with the confidence that we are accepted in Christ (Romans 11:33-36, Philippians 3:3, Hebrews 10:19-22), with humility (Psalms 51:15-17), with thankfulness (Hebrews 12:28), with a sincere heart (Hebrews 10:22, John 4:24, Matthew 15:8), with sacrifices of obedience and giving towards the work of God (Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 4:14-18), with praise (Hebrews 13:15) and with joyful hope (1 Peter 1:3-8).

2.3 Gathering

Worship services are corporate gatherings of God's people. The unity of the church in our gatherings is important (Romans 15:5-6). God's people are called to love one another (James 2:1-6a, 9), edify one another (1 Corinthians 14:26, Colossians 3:16) and participate in congregational praise (Revelation 5:11-14, Acts 2:47, Psalms 100). We are also not to neglect the unbelievers in our midst (1 Corinthians 14:23-25).

3.0 Preaching in worship service

The definition of preaching

We believe preaching is the applicative declaration of the Word of God through the man of God about God, the Gospel, Grace, and Glory.

Definitions:

3.1 Application

The preacher is to teach for transformation and not merely information. He is to teach in a way that applies God's Word to our daily lives.

3.2 Declaration

The preacher is to explain and apply the word of God faithfully and not to impose his own ideas into the text.

3.3 The Word of God

We declare not the opinions of man, but the authoritative Word of God.

3.4 Embodiment

Preaching is the exposition and application of God's Word to the people of God through the man of God.

3.5 God

There is a danger that preaching can be man-centred. Preaching should be God-centred.

3.6 Gospel

Preaching must be about the life-transforming message of the Gospel: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

3.7 Grace

The preaching of God's Word must be about what God does for us as well as what we do for God. Both of these aspects must be driven by grace – motivated by his unmerited favour towards us and enabled by his power to do his will. We must declare the exceeding grace of God towards us and also the need for grace-driven worship and service towards God.

3.8 Glory

Preaching reminds people of their hope of glory in Jesus Christ – the glorification of our bodies and the unrestricted beholding of the glory of God.

4.0 Worship songs & music in worship service

4.1 Purpose of worship songs and music in worship service

Worship songs and music used in worship service are means of communication. Through songs, we sing to God and to one another to remind ourselves of God's Word.

4.1.1 To God – praise, thanksgiving, prayer, confession

Colossians 3:16

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

We sing to God with praise, thanksgiving, prayer and confession. The Book of Psalms and Revelation 5:9-14 also demonstrate this.

4.1.2 To one another – truth in God's Word

Colossians 3:16

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

We are to teach, admonish and remind one another the truth in God's Word through songs.

It must be reiterated that music is a medium of communication – making music does not equate to worship, nor is it the central focus of worship. Music in worship service is also not for our personal pleasure or entertainment. Only God is the central focus of worship.

Praising God corporately in song is an essential part of a Christian's life and of the worship service. It should not be viewed as less important or inferior to other aspects of the service (e.g. prayer, preaching of the Word, Holy Communion).

4.2 Principles of worship songs and music in worship service

There are principles for how worship songs and music should be used during our worship services.

4.2.1 Worship songs should enable the entire church to worship together as one.

As far as possible, we should make choices so as to allow all of God's people to participate in corporate worship. This is in line with our mission to lead generations of God's people into a life-changing relationship with Jesus

Christ. Our choice of songs and musical arrangements should allow for as much participation by as many as possible. It should not be for the sake of performance. Singing songs together helps us express our unity in the Gospel.

We will choose a mix of songs ranging from hymns written by the saints of old to contemporary songs written in our day. We will also not be limited or conform to a certain style of music based on personal preferences.

Musical arrangements should facilitate corporate singing. For example, attention should be given to the various aspects of the songs (e.g. range – too high, too low, syncopation, irregularities in meter and rhythm) so as to allow the congregation to sing as one.

We should avoid introducing too many new or unfamiliar melodies or songs at once, as the unfamiliarity might discourage the congregation from participating.

4.2.2 Worship songs and music (melody, rhythm, lyrics, style, volume) should be appropriate and consistent with the truth we seek to communicate.

The tone, musical arrangements and musical styles should support the truth in the lyrics. For example, songs about joy should be sung with joy; songs of repentance should not be sung in an overly light-hearted way.

We will not use music merely to stir up feelings that are not rooted in God and His word. Instead, we seek to kindle deep and long-lasting godly affections as a response to who God is as revealed in His word. Instrumental portions of our worship service (e.g. during confession time, prayer, invitations and the offering) should seek to support and complement the ongoing activity during that time. They should not be used to draw attention to the musician(s).

The overall volume of the worship team should not overpower the voices of the congregation. The congregation's voices should be the main "instrument" in the worship service.

4.2.3 Worship songs and music should be a means of communication, not become a source of distraction.

The worship team (leaders, musicians, singers, AV team) must skillfully combine God's Word with music and labour towards "undistracting excellence". In order to achieve this, time and effort need to be set aside for rehearsals and coordination so that we can avoid/minimize mistakes during the service and execute the music in a way that does not draw attention to itself but helps direct the congregation's attention to God.

4.2.4 Physical expressions of worship (if any) should arise from a genuine outflow of the internal workings of the heart's response to Who God is.

Our outward expression in worship should flow from the inward heart of worship. It must be God-honouring, genuine, sincere and a natural response to what is happening in our hearts. It must not be done to draw attention to oneself or to make oneself appear spiritual.

4.2.5 Worship songs should be faithful to God's Word.

Whether the songs are loaded with truth or simple in content, we seek to choose songs that are biblical. The songs that we sing must contain truth from God's Word (Colossians 3:16-17) and must be theologically sound.

4.2.6 The associations that are attached to certain tunes need to be considered when choosing our worship songs and music.

Certain tunes may have associations that are not desirable or bear similarities with music that is strongly associated with sinful lifestyles or habits. It will be wise not to use these tunes or melodies for our worship songs or music. It may not be wise to change the lyrics of a song that was previously used to glorify sin while retaining its melody and use it in our worship services.

The source and authorship of the song are also associations to be considered before songs are chosen/introduced.

While we do not subscribe to "guilt by association" and do not want to call a piece of music sinful just because it bears similarities with secular music that promotes sinful values and lifestyles, we acknowledge that associations can cause people to recall emotions and memories that may hinder their worship of God.

4.2.7 Worship songs and music are important, but love is more important.

We can differ on the choices of songs and music. However, we must not allow differing opinions to cause division and strife. Pastor Kevin DeYoung said, "I imagine the Apostle Paul, if he were writing to the church today, might have something to say about our worship style. 'If I sing in style of the hippest music, but have not love, I am only a banging drum or a strumming guitar. If I have a gift for reading music and enjoy the richest hymns, but have not love, I am nothing. If I am discerning of excellent music and fine poetry, but have not love, I gain nothing.' The first principle for singing as a congregation and choosing music for the congregation is love" (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2011/06/28/ten-principles-for-church-song-part-1/> , accessed 6 Oct 2016).

Showing love to others through our use and choice of music/songs can be done in several ways:

- Being considerate towards one another and the types of music others are more accustomed to by not being judgmental or demanding that they conform to our tastes.
- Learning about the different musical forms/genres from different cultures and maybe even introducing them into our service and helping one another appreciate the cultural diversity of the church, which is partly represented by the diversity of musical styles.
- Not being judgmental when others sing loudly or out of tune.
- Being charitable to the music team if they make mistakes or do not meet our expectations.

4.3 Checklist for using music in worship service

This checklist is derived from the principles mentioned above. Wisdom and discernment are required for specific application in various congregations or contexts.

- 4.3.1 Does our music seek to glorify God, or is it for personal entertainment?
- 4.3.2 Is our music God-centred or man-centred?
- 4.3.3 Does our music help people to know God in accordance to Scriptures?
- 4.3.4 Does our music help people to revere God?
- 4.3.5 Does our music encourage orderliness in a service or does it generate chaos?
- 4.3.6 Does our music allow for a range of expression seen in the Bible - from humble brokenness to confidence in God's grace/thankfulness/joyful hope?
- 4.3.7 Is the whole congregation able to follow the melody?
- 4.3.8 Are the songs we sing easy to understand?
- 4.3.9 Do we sing to God and about God (to one another)?
- 4.3.10 Is the music appropriate for the song's content and consistent with the truth we seek to communicate?
- 4.3.11 Are there sources of distraction? Eg. from the music accompaniment, musician (posture and dressing), volume of music, lighting, AV support.
- 4.3.12 Does the music remind people of worldly values and of questionable "Christian groups" with obvious doctrinal errors.
- 4.3.13 Are we teaching the church that love is more important than music?

4.4 Frequently asked questions

Worship songs and music

4.4.1 Why do we sing hymns and contemporary songs?

Hymns connect us to the rich heritage of our spiritual predecessors, while contemporary songs connect us to the church in our day and age. Each age has its own music. Singing music from different ages unites us with believers both past and present under the same Christ, singing the same praises to our same Lord, and reminds us that we are part of a global church spanning both space and time.

4.4.2 Why do we add new songs to our repertoire? How do we select these songs? How often should we introduce them?

New songs help us to express age-old truths in new and fresh ways. New songs can also help us connect with a new generation of believers.

As explained above, we use our checklist as a guide when adding new songs to our repertoire. New songs, where appropriate, should be introduced in a way where the congregation can learn it comfortably and participate in singing them readily. For example, if most of the songs sung during a worship service are new, the congregation may have a sense of unfamiliarity and will not be able to follow the singing and participate meaningfully in the worship.

4.4.3 If I have a new song to recommend, who should I go to?

Please feel free to contact your pastor or your worship leader.

4.4.4 Can we have a choir/orchestra in worship?

Sure! We are not limited to a particular style or musical team set up. The overall set up should still aim for as much participation as possible for worship by the entire congregation. Other practical considerations like expertise and resources will be helpful in making such decisions.

4.4.5 What are the principles you have in regards to the volume of the music?

The music should not drown out the voices of God's people. The music should facilitate greater engagement in singing by the congregation. It should not be a performance where the music team sings and makes music on behalf or instead of the congregation.

4.4.6 Why can't we use drums /drum sets?

Based on the principles above, we can! Drums and drum sets are not inherently evil. The use of drums is not forbidden in the Bible. In fact, there is no prohibition of any specific instrument in the Bible. Percussion instruments such as tambourine, cymbal and timbrel were used for worship in the Bible. However, there are still sound principles that we must observe should we decide to use drums. For example, the sound of the instrument

should not drown out the singing of God's people and we should not use of any instrument to impress people. The sensitivity towards the readiness of the congregation to have a drum set as part of congregational worship is an important consideration as well.

Expressions

4.4.7 Can I raise my hands and clap during worship?

Certainly! Raising of hands and clapping are not forbidden in the Bible. As explained before, our outward posture should reflect an inward posture of worship. See also 4.2.4.

4.4.8 Is dancing allowed during worship?

There is no specific prohibition of dancing during worship. We must certainly not have dance forms that may be sensual in nature, nor that which causes disorderliness in worship.

4.4.9 What should I do if I hear or see anything that disturbs me in worship?

We value your feedback on any matters of concern. You can speak with your Pastor or you can also email us at shine@gospellight.sg.

4.4.10 Is a "special item" (e.g. song item, testimonies) allowed in worship service?

Sure! However, pastoral approval must be sought on a case by case basis.

4.4.11 Is there a specific attire for the worship team and is there a specific attire for the congregation?

The worship team is to lead but not to impress. As such, the team should dress modestly, decently and honorably.

The congregation should also dress modestly, decently and honorably. The church must not despise those who are dressed poorly (James 2:2-6a).

Environment

4.4.12 Should we use a brightly lit room or a dim room?

Lighting can be a subjective matter. Scriptures do not prescribe a brightly lit room or a dim room for worship. There are times where dimming the lights is necessary, such as when the projection on the screen is of a very poor quality and the congregation cannot see the lyrics if the lights are not dimmed.

Under normal circumstances, a brightly lit room helps:

- 1) the congregation to see and to sing to one another (Colossians 3:16)
- 2) the worship leader to see the congregation and lead it more effectively
- 3) encourage participation and not turn the worship service into a stage performance

When we start quantifying worship in terms of light and mood, we have already departed from the heart of worship. Worship is to be in spirit and in truth. Worship is about God. Lighting and aesthetics are secondary matters.

Association

4.4.13 Are there any worship groups we should not select songs from?

Song selection should be based on the song's merit, that is, the truth it communicates. However, care must also be taken to consider the source and authorship of the song. If the source or author is clearly erroneous in their teachings, it would be wise to avoid using their songs as this negative association can stumble instead of edify the as we may be seen to endorse the erroneous teachings and the teachers.

Qualification

4.4.14c Who can serve in the worship team?

Worship team members must be born again Christians who have a personal relationship with God and love God. As they serve in a public ministry, they should also be of good standing within the church community.

Members of the team should be proficient in their area of service. For example, musicians should be skilled in playing their respective instrument, leaders should be able to facilitate corporate singing, and AV team members should have sufficient proficiency in setting up and utilizing their equipment.

We greatly value committed and passionate members. Potential members should be prepared to attend rehearsals to practice together as a team as well as be diligent in practicing songs and preparing music score sheets to facilitate skilful execution of the songs during the actual worship service.

If you are interested in using your gifts in our worship team to serve God and others, we would love for you to be part of the team! Please feel free to approach our ministry leader. Please note that auditions and/or practice sessions may be arranged for you depending on the role you are interested in.