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THE WORSHIP-DISCIPLESHIP NEXUS:
INTEGRATING WORSHIP PRACTICE
AND A DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

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THE WORSHIP-DISCIPLESHIP NEXUS:
INTEGRATING WORSHIP PRACTICE
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For the glory of God and the flourishing of his people.

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PREFACE

This project would have been impossible without the contributions of many others. At Southern Seminary, Dr. Joe Crider helped to effect a transition to the EdD program, a shift in direction that has been used by God to deepen my studies and broaden the scope of my project. The professors at Southern facilitated a rich space for intense growth and learning, consistently challenging me to think more completely and to communicate more clearly. My advisor, Dr. Anthony Foster, spoke into the project at every stage with wisdom and grace, affirming and gently correcting where needed. And my brothers and sister in the cohort were continual sources of mutual encouragement, and I am confident will be lifelong friends.

The leadership, staff and members of my church family at Bella Vista Church have partnered with me through these past three years in the program. Many have shown genuine interest in this project, which intersects so directly with our own life and ministry together. They have endured countless conversations about my recent studies, have provided freedom for research and writing, and are eager to put into practice the principles uncovered here. I am so thankful.

Though they did not directly participate in the project, the leadership and members of Calvary Baptist Church in Grand Rapids, MI, Shawnee Baptist Church in Shamong, NJ, and Highland Hills Baptist Church in Grand Rapids, all have contributed to my development as a minister of the gospel and a leader of corporate worship gatherings. I am so thankful to have been able to partner with such gracious and godly leaders, and to have served in such loving and supportive congregations, where by God's grace we have together been able to do profitable ministry. God has used our rich

experiences with these church families in multiple meaningful ways, and this thesis is in part an outworking of many lessons learned among them.

My wife, Hayley, has been deeply invested in this project, and has been a constant source of blessing and strength to me. More than even this, I am thankful for her deep investment in Christ's church. Her life as both a true disciple and a true worshiper is a rich example to me, to our children and to all who know her.

I am deeply thankful for God's leading in my life, and his enablement to complete this thesis. I pray that this work will result in the furtherance of the gospel and the advancement of God's kingdom in the world.

Chad Vitarelli

Byron Center, Michigan

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Problem

At this writing, the past fifteen months have been unprecedented in the life of the church in the United States. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has changed the face of corporate worship. Video production and live-streaming capabilities have been tremendous provisional tools during this time, enabling local churches to gather around the same Sunday songs and sermon content. However, this provision has come with a large price tag: the isolation of believers from one another. Worship viewed on screens from people's living rooms is worship individually engaged. Believers are connected to the content of the service but disconnected from one another. Private worship is a byproduct or outgrowth of corporate worship, not an acceptable substitute for it.¹

This imposed isolation brings with it a natural orientation towards the self. Church members are taking in biblical content through the same medium that they would watch a movie or television program. The expectation when viewing entertainment media is that one will have an experience and that an emotional response will be invoked. Indeed, a host of Scriptures testify to emotional responses and ecstatic experiences that accompany worship. However, emotions and experiences are a response to God's presence and the truth about God's character and working, and not ends in themselves.²

¹ As Allen P. Ross states, "One of the goals of the corporate worship of the church should be to inspire and instruct private worship." Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 424.

² In condemning this idea of emotional experience as the highest priority in worship, Graham Kendrick points to its logical conclusion: ". . . as if the highest achievement of our whole pilgrimage on earth was to enter some kind of praise-induced ecstasy!" Graham Kendrick, *Learning to Worship as a Way of Life* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985), 32.

It could be argued that COVID did more than simply change the way we worship for a time period. It exposed the faulty way that many believers already viewed the nature and purpose of their corporate gathering for worship, and it served to further ingrain some bad habits into the life of the church. COVID did not cause Christians in the United States to be isolated from one another or to be oriented towards their own selfish interests. Temptations abound in current culture for churchgoers to evaluate worship individually by performances or production elements, rather than allowing God’s Spirit to evaluate them, search their hearts, reveal wicked ways, and lead in the everlasting way (Ps 139:23).³

Hebrews 10 likewise paints a very different picture of the nature of our worship gatherings. In verse 19, the author reminds believers of the sacrifice and priestly ministry of Jesus. He has, through his body and blood, given us “confidence to enter the holy places.”⁴ Because of the way that has been made for us by Jesus and because he is our great high priest, we are implored to draw near to him. This “drawing near” is not only an individual activity but also a corporate one. We are encouraged to do this together.⁵ As we draw near to God, we are to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (vv. 24-25). As forgiven and cleansed family members in Christ, we are to gather regularly together, and in and through that gathering, we grow.

³ Monique M. Ingalls notes the predominant testimony at two recent worship concerts that she attended: “Leaders and participants at the two conferences also shared many beliefs about the role of music in worship and spiritual life, including participants’ expectation of a personal encounter with God during congregational singing. During these times, worshipers described what God was doing in terms of ‘speaking into,’ ‘ministering,’ or ‘being real to me.’” Monique M. Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 85.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

⁵ The context and verb tense throughout assumes the corporate sense.

This challenge to growth through corporate gathering is echoed throughout the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul challenges the church in their desire for and exercise of spiritual gifts in their worship services. In doing so, he calls them to the underlying purpose of their gathering together: “What then brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done *for building up*” (v. 26; emphasis added). When we gather, we grow.

In other Pauline passages, such as Ephesians 5:18-21 and Colossians 3:16-17, our singing together is expressly tied to our growth. In Colossians, the dwelling of the word of Christ in us overflows in our teaching and admonishing one another, which takes place in the context of our singing together.⁶ In Ephesians 5, the filling of the Spirit results in songs that are directed to God as well as to one another.⁷ Gathering together to worship God is bound together with discipleship. Christians meet not as independent individuals in relative isolation but in community to be further oriented towards God and towards the community.

The corporate worship gathering is the most attended event in the church’s life, and for many, it is the first step in their relationship with a local body of believers.⁸ It could be argued that in terms of planning and personnel, more is invested in the Sunday

⁶ According to Scot McKnight, “The specifics of the indwelling *logos* are spelled out in these terms: first, teaching and admonishing are the primary *logos* acts within the fellowship, and second, they occur in psalms, hymns and Spirit-prompted songs. This is a rare glimpse into the nature of early Christian corporate gatherings.” Scot McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 330.

⁷ Andrew Lincoln’s commentary on Ephesians 5 summarizes well the relationship between corporate songs and spiritual formation: “This Spirit-filled living will manifest itself in their corporate worship, as they address and edify one another by means of all the types of songs the Spirit inspires, as they sing praise to of Christ from the heart, and as they in Christ’s name offer thanksgiving to their God and Father for all the blessings he has bestowed on them.” Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 347.

⁸ A Barna study surveyed practicing Christians, where “practicing Christians” was defined as “as self-identified Christians who say their faith is very important to their lives and who have attended a worship service, other than for a special occasion, one or more times during the past month worship service.” Of those surveyed, no more than 43 percent participated in other church-life activities (e.g., Sunday School, small groups). Barna Group. “New Research on the State of Discipleship,” December 1, 2015, <https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/>.

morning service than in any other event or program of the church. Often viewed as the “front door,” the Sunday worship service is an opportunity for people to get a first glimpse of a local church before they dig more deeply into opportunities for relationship, learning, and ministry. This perception of the worship service as “ front door” can have the unintentional consequence of people coming as individuals or individual households to watch, experience, and evaluate “worship,” which is then defined as the style or quality of music, the level of engagement with the preaching, or the ministry offerings that a church provides for families.⁹

The corporate worship gathering is more than a front door or a first glimpse. The witness of the Scriptures presented above and the presumption of this study is that the biblical practice of corporate worship will strongly impact the discipleship of each believer. Great concern is raised when the church is gathering on Sunday mornings with expectations *other than* the heightened anticipation that she will grow in Christ in community. When believers come to church as individuals or individual households isolated from other believers and oriented towards themselves, they cannot truly worship, and the church cannot fulfill her mission of making disciples.¹⁰

The perceived problem is that few churches adequately relate corporate worship practice to the discipleship process. Most would affirm the spiritual benefit and even centrality of corporate worship in the life of believers. Most would affirm the strong convergence between worship and discipleship. However, few church leaders intentionally plan worship services with the primary expectation that believers will grow

⁹ Per David Peterson, “Worship must involve certain identifiable attitudes, but something is seriously wrong when people equate spiritual self-gratification with worship!” David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 17.

¹⁰ In a survey of 1,300 Christian adults given definitions of “discipleship,” the highest-ranking definition was the most self-centered: “Discipleship is about connecting with someone who will help you connect with God for the purpose of fulfilling your God-given destiny.” Barna Group, “State of Discipleship.”

as a result. That is, the criteria for selection and execution of worship elements are not expressly related to the discipleship of believers. This lack of intentional planning on the part of leadership contributes to an already prevalent lack of expectation on the part of church members. However, though intentional planning may be lacking, when leaders in local churches affirm the convergence between worship and discipleship, they will plan corporate gatherings with a view towards spiritual growth.

Research Questions

The intent of this study was to learn from exemplar church leaders who recognize significant convergence between the biblical aims of corporate worship and Christian discipleship. By observing their planning practices, my desire was to ascertain practical aspects of worship design that positively impact and inform the disciple-making process. Quantifying spiritual growth is highly difficult and complex, and doing so is well beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, if the spiritual growth of Christ-followers happens through and in the context of corporate worship, then observing exemplar pastoral practitioners of worship proves highly beneficial. Three main questions guided this study:

1. To what extent does the church intentionally incorporate worship practice as a part of the disciple-making process?
2. To what extent do corporate worship practices or specific elements lead to and impact spiritual growth?
3. How do leaders prepare their congregations to perceive and engage corporate worship as part of the discipleship pathway?

Intentional Incorporation

In answer to the first research question, I have highlighted any instance of intentional integration of worship practice with the ongoing discipleship of believers.

Worship Elements

The second question involves the building blocks of worship services: individual corporate worship elements, the purposeful arrangement of those elements, and the frequency and regularity of those elements.

Congregational Preparation

The question of preparing the congregation involves what happens outside the corporate worship gathering as well as the communication that occurs within it.

Terminology

The definitions of “worship” and “disciple/discipleship” reflect a synthesis of the literature, and will receive further clarification and expansion in chapter two. Both definitions have been expressed most clearly by Dr. Scott Aniol in his recent article, “Practice Makes Perfect: Corporate Worship and the Formation of Spiritual Virtue.” Aniol’s primary argument is that “spiritual virtue is shaped by cultivation of inclinations through habitual behavior in community.”¹¹ Providentially, I encountered his article near the end of my literature review. Aniol’s definitions of corporate worship and discipleship and his articulation of their convergence in the life of the church served to affirm the direction of this study, and provided the foundation of the definitions below. In a recent conversation, he had an opportunity to review this project and affirmed its direction as a practical outworking of his article.

Worship. “Drawing near in communion with God through Christ in faith by the Spirit.”¹² Chapter 2 will show this drawing near in worship to be a response to revelation, through redemption, as a life to which God calls us, and towards and in the midst of a community.

¹¹ Scott Aniol, “Practice Makes Perfect: Corporate Worship and the Formation of Spiritual Virtue,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 10, no. 1 (2017): 94.

¹² From a conversation with Dr. Scott Aniol.

A disciple is “a follower of Jesus characterized by his/her observance of all that Christ commanded. The life of *discipleship* is a response to Christ’s commands with an increasing display of behaviors that better reflect biblical values (Matt 28:19).¹³

Spiritual growth is “the sense of the development and the maturing of one’s Christian life and experience.”¹⁴ By this definition, spiritual growth is inherently Christian. A Christian is “one who believes in Jesus Christ and seeks to live in the ways he taught.”¹⁵ For the purposes of this study then, “spiritual growth” and “discipleship” are used interchangeably.

Discipleship pathway. This term is being used to denote a purposed, formalized plan by church leadership to facilitate the growth in discipleship of Christian believers in the church. It is synonymous with a discipleship program, process or journey.

Methodology

In chapter 2, I review four relevant areas of literature. First is the understanding and practice of biblical worship. The second area involves the distinguishing marks of a Christian disciple. Significant scholarship exists for each of these areas, and there are key points of convergence between the two. The indispensable elements of both biblical worship and Christian discipleship that they share with each other form the necessary foundation of this study. There are four tenets of a biblical theology of worship that can be clearly seen in the Scriptures and that are uncovered in a synthesis of the relevant precedent literature:

1. Worship is a response to God’s revelation.
2. Worship is a response only possible through redemption.

¹³ Aniol, “Practice Makes Perfect,” 94.

¹⁴ Donald McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1996), 437.

¹⁵ McKim, 47.

3. Worship is primarily a life orientation.
4. Worship draws us into deeper community.

These tenets guided the formulation of interview questions, and the practices of participant churches were measured against them. The four tenets of biblical worship intersect very naturally with biblical principles of Christian discipleship. As is demonstrated in this thesis, worship and discipleship are whole-life endeavors: responses to the Word of God by redeemed people while engaged in community.

Third, the function of liturgy in corporate worship throughout church history was investigated for purposes and goals related to Christian discipleship. Fourth and finally, any precedent studies of the intersection of these larger categories were reviewed.

Chapter 3 outlines the study that seeks to answer the research questions. In the first phase, expert worship scholars and practitioners were presented with the underlying tenets of biblical worship and convergent ideas in discipleship that guide this study. On the basis of what the Scriptures convey and what scholarship confirms regarding the nature of worship and discipleship, the scholars and practitioners were asked to recommend one-to-three exemplar churches, each of whom—in their view—is operating from a robust theology of worship and approaches the corporate worship gathering as an essential step on the discipleship pathway of its people.

Following the recommendations of the worship experts, exemplar churches were contacted with a request for an on-site or virtual visit and for interviews of the worship leader, pastor, or planner. There were two data-gathering components. First, the worship leader, pastor, or planner was interviewed as to their planning process and priorities as well as any methods of congregational preparation. Second, I attended a worship service. Except in one instance where it was not available, I attended virtually via a livestream.

Chapter 4 describes in detail the findings from worship service attendance and interviews. Chapter 5 synthesizes the data gathered from interviews and observations into

a matrix and a rubric. These instruments will function as diagnostic or evaluative tools for church leaders planning worship services and leading their congregations.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENT LITERATURE

The study of how corporate worship contributes to the development of Christian disciples involves the intersection of two overarching scriptural themes. The first is the understanding and practice of biblical worship. The second involves the distinguishing marks of a Christian disciple. Significant scholarship exists for each of these areas and there are significant points of convergence between the two. After the pursuit of biblical-theological definitions of corporate worship and Christian discipleship, this chapter will turn to historical church practice. Specifically, the function of liturgy in corporate worship throughout church history will be investigated for purposes and goals related to Christian discipleship. Finally, any precedent studies of the intersection of these larger categories will be reviewed.

A Biblical Theology of Worship

The aim of this project is to develop a biblical theology that finds wide scholarly consensus. Many have written theologically regarding worship. However, this review focuses on works that have gleaned a theology of worship through the entire Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. Many other works are cited, but it is these all-encompassing studies that will be the primarily reviewed references. This review will proceed canonically through the metanarrative, referencing these relevant theological works throughout along with any disagreements between them.

One of the most influential and widely cited works on a theology of worship in the last thirty years is David Peterson's *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992). It is noteworthy in terms of its scope, its care

in exegesis, and its New Testament understanding of worship as the gathering for mutual edification. More recently, Noel Due has written *Created for Worship: From Genesis to Revelation to You* (Geanies House, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005). It is a similarly wide-ranging work that gives a helpful metanarrative framework. Due's treatment in particular of Jesus's fulfillment of Israel's worship is immensely helpful. Allen P. Ross has written *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006). As primarily an Old Testament scholar, Ross fills in some of Peterson's deficits in regard to the Psalms and prophetic literature. In *Worship in the New Testament: Divine Mystery and Human Response* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008), New Testament scholar Gerald Borchert presents a theology of worship "to detail the New Testament's responses to mystery in the coming of Jesus by reflecting on the lessons in the Gospels, the worship and life of the early church, and the expectations that have enlivened worship down through the ages from our inspired texts."¹ And even more recently, Daniel I. Block's *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014) is a truly comprehensive work that cites Ross and Peterson substantially while building on their foundations.

Old Testament Terms

The English word "worship," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means "to honour or revere as a supernatural being or power, or as a holy thing; to regard or approach with veneration; to adore with appropriate acts or ceremonies."² A study of worship in the Scriptures cannot be limited to the English definition, or to a single word,

¹ Gerald Borchert, *Worship in the New Testament: Divine Mystery and Human Response* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008), Introduction, sec. 2, para. 1, Kindle.

² *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "worship, v.," accessed January 17, 2021, <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/view/Entry/230346?rskey=fAxa&result=2>.

since there is a family of terms that are at times translated “worship” and help to convey a mosaic of thought regarding the term.³

The word in the Greek Bible most commonly translated “to worship” is *proskunein*.⁴ It is a compound of *pros* (“towards”) and *kunein* (“to kiss”).⁵ The Greeks abandoned the outward gesture but kept the term for the inner attitude. Later, the word took on a much more general sense expressing love and respect.⁶ *Proskunein* is typically the Greek word used for the Hebrew *hištaḥawâ*. The suggestion of many is that the literal meaning of this verb, which occurs 170 times in the Hebrew Bible, is to “bend oneself over at the waist.” In any case, both the Greek and Hebrew terms refer to a physical act and came to be used for the inward attitude of homage or respect that the outward gesture represented.⁷ Throughout the Old Testament, *proskunein* and *hištaḥawâ* are used nearly interchangeably to talk about both an inward attitude and an outward activity, often motivated by gratitude (Exod 4:31; 34:8; Judg 7:15; Ruth 2:10; 1 Kgs 4:36; 1 Sam 20:41; Job 1:21). Not only does this term refer to physical actions and underlying attitudes, but it also denotes both formal cultic activities and informal personal ones.

Another common word translated “to worship” is *latreia*. The verb, unevenly distributed, occurs some ninety times in the Septuagint (LXX), mostly in Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges. The Hebrew original is *ʿbd*, which is usually rendered *douleia* when human relations are at issue and *latreia* when the reference is to divine

³ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 55.

⁴ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 57. Peterson notes, “The writers of the New Testament appear to have been considerably influenced by the Septuagint and its use of worship terminology” (56). This is his basis for using the Greek translation of these Old Testament terms.

⁵ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 758-59.

⁶ Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 948.

⁷ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 57.

service. *Latreia* always has a religious sense except in the play on words in Deuteronomy 28:48 (LXX).⁸ In the Hebrew, the equivalent of *latreia* is *abad* (“to serve”). This term is used as a comprehensive term for Israel’s relationship with God (Deut 10:12, 20; 11:3). The demand of Moses is that Israel be allowed to serve God in the desert, to “formalize their relationship with their God by serving him cultically with sacrificial offerings.”⁹ The term, again, refers to both an attitude of servitude and action, both formal and informal.

The third term is *sebomai*, or the Hebrew *yare*, which is translated “fear.” The sense of this term is more in the positive sense of reverence or respect and is paired often in the Old Testament with obedience (Deut 5:29; 6:2, 13, 24; 8:6; 10:12; Josh 24:14; 1 Chr 6:31; Job 1:1; Eccl 12:13).¹⁰

These terms show that acceptable worship, according to the Old Testament terms, involves homage, service, and reverence—demonstrated in the whole of life. As Peterson says, “Worship refers to an inward attitude, an outward activity, and a defining lifestyle, and all of this was a response to the God who had revealed himself to them and redeemed them, making it possible to engage with him acceptably.”¹¹

Worship in Eden

Even before human beings were created, the entire creation is shown to be worshipping God (1 Chr 16:23-33; Ps 96; 148). As Due says, “God is the initiator of

⁸ Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 503. Deuteronomy 28:47-48 reads, “Because you did not serve [*latreuein*] the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve [*latreuein*] your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you.”

⁹ David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield, UK: Bloomberg Academic, 1997), 48.

¹⁰ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 71.

¹¹ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 71.

worship. It begins with God, and it was evident in the celestial and terrestrial creation before human beings were brought into existence. This means that when God created our first parents, they came into a worship-filled creation.”¹² Just as God initiated worship, it is also clear from the first chapters of the Bible that worship is directed towards him. God created humankind and communicated to them his provision, plan, and expectations. He had revealed himself to them, and they were to respond obediently. Without God’s revelation and initiation, there is no worship.¹³

Ross says, “Communion with the living God is at the heart of all worship; and where God is present with his people is a sanctuary.”¹⁴ Many biblical scholars have followed this line of reasoning as well as parallels in ancient Near East literature to show that God created the cosmos, and the garden of Eden, as a temple.¹⁵ G. K. Beale lists nine parallels between Eden and the symbolism of the Israelite tabernacle and temple, showing that “the garden of Eden was a temple in the first creation.”¹⁶ Against this prevailing view, Daniel Block offers a rebuttal on three counts:

First, all the supposedly priestly elements are capable of different interpretations. Second, while the instructions concerning the tabernacle suggest that the structure was designed as a microcosm of creation, this does not mean creation is a macrocosm of the tabernacle. Finally, the interpretation is precluded by the function of sanctuaries in the Bible and the ancient Near East. Temples were constructed as

¹² Noel Due, *Created for Worship: From Genesis to Revelation to You* (Geanies House, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 37.

¹³ Due, *Created for Worship*, 37.

¹⁴ Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 82.

¹⁵ The key contributions to the corpus of study on this issue have been extensively summarized by Richard Davidson, “Earth’s First Sanctuary: Genesis 1-3 and Parallel Creation Accounts,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015): 65-89. Davidson cites twenty-three scholars—including T. Desmond Alexander, G. K. Beale, William J. Dumbrell, and Meredith G. Kline—as a “representative list” of the “scores of biblical scholars” who have supplies the evidence to support this conclusion concerning Eden” (65).

¹⁶ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 617-22.

residences for deity. Although God walked about in the garden, he did not live there; nor did he create the world so he could have a home.¹⁷

Still, Block concedes that though Eden may not be a temple in a strict sense, “the garden was sacred space because YHWH made it, owned it, and placed his image (humankind) there.”¹⁸ Whereas the inanimate creation glorifies God, “only humans and angels are capable of obeying God consciously and willingly and thus glorifying God most fully.”¹⁹ Humankind brings glory to God as his image-bearers. Thomas Schreiner states it thus: “God is the sovereign creator who extends his kingship over the world. But he extends his rule through human beings, for as God’s image-bearers they must govern the world for God’s glory and honor.”²⁰

Adam has the responsibility to “guard” (*samar*) and to “serve” (*abad*). Beale says that when these terms occur together later in the Old Testament, “without exception they have this meaning and refer either to Israelites serving and guarding/obeying God’s word (about 10x) or, more often, to priests who serve God in the temple and guard the temple from unclean things entering it (Num 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18:5-6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14).”²¹

The biblical prologue shows that worship is for God’s glory and is humanity’s proper destiny and delight. Gordon Wenham shows the great contrast between Genesis 1-3 and similar Mesopotamian cosmologies: “Wherein Mesopotamian thought, man worked so that the gods could rest, in Genesis, God worked until man’s needs were

¹⁷ Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 298.

¹⁸ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 298.

¹⁹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 344.

²⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 6.

²¹ Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 618.

satisfied. The God of Genesis is totally concerned with man's welfare."²² As the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* puts it, "The chief end of man is to glorify God *and* to enjoy him forever."²³ Further, as Due states, "God is to be worshipped, not simply because he demands to be, but because this is the proper destiny of his creation. Anything less dishonours him and disfigures it."²⁴ Adam served God by obeying his commands, and Adam found full satisfaction in that obedience.

As all of creation existed for God's glory and every relationship and responsibility of humanity was to participate in that glory giving, humanity's sin and the resulting curse extended with similar scope and magnitude. Paul couches the sinful rebellion of humans in worship language: mankind "worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:25). Daniel Akin says, "Idoltrous worship can be directed to inanimate objects, living creatures, or human beings. In all cases the worship that rightfully should be directed to the Creator is misdirected or misplaced to someone or something else."²⁵ Just as worship of the one true living God encompasses both formal and informal acts, so also idoltrous worship includes ritual activity and day-to-day decisions, resulting in character-forming behavior. As the psalmist says of idol makers, "Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them" (Ps 115:8).²⁶

There is great consensus to be found among these worship theologians. God created the heavens and the earth for his glory, with humanity as the pinnacle of that

²² Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 53.

²³ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism in Modern English* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1986), page 1/article 1 (emphasis added).

²⁴ Due, *Created for Worship*, 39.

²⁵ Daniel L. Akin, *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 347.

²⁶ See G. K. Beale's summary of this verse, which is the thesis statement of his study: "What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration." G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 16.

creation. God initiates the scope and boundaries of worship, and humankind's obedient responses are worship offerings to the sovereign Creator.

The Worship of the Patriarchs

Peterson describes the climate of the ancient world, post-fall:

The great concern of people in the ancient world was to know where the presence of a god could be found and to know the names of gods so that they could be approached and communion with them established. Certain localities came to be identified as the dwelling-places of the gods, and here altars were erected and patterns of worship established. Part of the tradition of the shrine or temple would be the story of how the place had come to be recognized as the abode of the god.²⁷

Worship of these pagan deities was initiated by humanity, and the deity was localized and compartmentalized according to the specifications of humanity. This human-initiated, human-directed practice stands in stark contrast to the God of the Scriptures. Block's only rebuttal of the garden of Eden as a temple is significant for the corrective he offers: "nor did he create the world so he could have a home."²⁸ As Solomon declared in praise to God, "The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you" (1 Kgs 8:27).

In contrast to the pagan practices of surrounding cultures, God revealed himself to Abraham (or Abram) in words. It was by the revelation of God that Abraham, living in the major religious center of ancient Sumer, would come to understand that there was only one sovereign God and therefore only one way to worship. Ross additionally outlines the ways that God revealed his character, activity, and commands. Because God had revealed himself, Abraham believed that Yahweh was "the living God, the sovereign God, the righteous judge, the gracious God and the faithful God."²⁹ This revelation formed the content of Abram's faith and shaped his worship practice.

²⁷ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 24.

²⁸ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 298.

²⁹ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 136-37.

In connection with “calling on the name of the Lord,” Abram set up altars.³⁰ Tremper Longman points out the centrality of altars to the worship of the patriarchs. He says, “We will later see that altars were incorporated in the larger sanctuaries, the tabernacle and the temple, but before Moses, the altar was the only architectural feature marking a place as holy.”³¹ Also, the act of setting up an altar increasingly became linked to locations where God had revealed himself to his people, notably at Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, and the region of Moriah (Gen 12:6-7; 13:18; 22:9).³² Ross shows that the setting up of an altar was not just a superstitious response to his encounters with God; “instead, Abraham was declaring God to be worthy of his praise as well as his trust.”³³

The altar was a place of sincere, spontaneous worship offered in gratitude as a response to God’s revelation. It was also a place of sacrifice. In Genesis 22, Abraham is called to offer his son Isaac. In his willingness to do so, Abraham learned that the surrendering of oneself was the prerequisite of a pleasing sacrifice. As Ross says, “The faithful understood that the animal was merely a substitute, that they were surrendering themselves to God.”³⁴ There is again great agreement in significant areas of scholarship on key points.

From Egypt to Sinai, Tabernacle to Temple

John Currid describes the exodus as “a second creation. It was a new conquest of chaos, another prevailing over the waters of the deep, and a redemptive creation of the

³⁰ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 25.

³¹ Tremper Longman, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel’s Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), chap. 2, para. 3, Kindle.

³² Mark Johnston, “A Biblical Theology of Worship,” *Foundations* 76 (May 2019): 14.

³³ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 143.

³⁴ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 141.

people of Israel.”³⁵ The exodus event is a defining moment not only in the history of the nation of Israel but also in the history of God’s people. As Christopher Wright says, “It is the exodus that provided the primary model of God’s idea of redemption, not just in the Old Testament but in the New, where it is used as one of the keys to understanding the meaning of the cross of Christ.”³⁶

In the call and commissioning of Moses, God made it clear that the deliverance from the Egyptians is not only *from* bondage but also deliverance *for* worship. God revealed himself to Moses; God came to Moses and said that he would deliver his people. God then offers a sign to Moses of his sending him and of his intention to deliver: “when I have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve [*abad*] God on this mountain” (Exod 3:12). This theme is repeated throughout the encounters between Moses and Pharaoh. Due highlights that Pharaoh himself called the Israelites’ service “sacrifice” (Exod 5:17; 8:8, 25, 28), indicating that he understood that the issue involved their worship.³⁷ God’s deliverance was also a judgment against Egypt’s gods and pharaoh, who according to their tradition was the god of the Egyptian state and was responsible to maintain cosmic order, or *maat*, on earth.³⁸

The final plague involved the Israelites’ placing of lamb’s blood on their doorposts. God used this particular plague to break the heart of Pharaoh, and he instituted a memorial meal for the people to observe in worship and in remembrance of his deliverance (Exod 12). Michael Horton notes that Passover is a “rite of commemoration

³⁵ John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 115.

³⁶ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 25.

³⁷ Due, *Created for Worship*, 73.

³⁸ James K. Hoffmeier, “Plagues of Egypt,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. William A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 4:1057.

of a participation in a redemptive-historical event that God brought about in the concrete existence of a particular people.”³⁹

In the next chapters of Exodus, God fulfilled the sign by meeting with the people at Mount Sinai.⁴⁰ In Exodus 19:3-4, God instructed Moses to remind the people how the Lord had graciously brought them to himself through his mighty acts. Then, God summarized the relationship into which he had drawn them: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (vv. 5-6). Peterson comments on these verses, saying, “This terminology suggest that the engagement with God at Sinai was to inaugurate a total-life pattern of service or worship for the nation. Their salvation had been in fulfillment of the covenant made with the patriarchs and now they were being told how to keep that covenant and live out the relationship it implied.”⁴¹

The people underwent special preparations and then approached the mountain. The worship service began with God speaking, identifying himself as the Redeemer of Israel, and calling them to exclusive devotion to himself in the Ten Commandments.

While at Sinai, God commanded the Israelites to build a structure that would ensure his presence in their midst as they journeyed through the wilderness to the promised land (Exod 25-31; 35-40). The tabernacle was called the house of Yahweh (*bet yhwh*; Exod 34:26), his “big house” (*hekal*; 1 Sam 1:9; 3:3), his “dwelling place”

³⁹ Michael Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 114.

⁴⁰ Block lists no less than seven foundational revelations of the character and work of God that come from Exodus 19-24: (1) God faithfully keeps his covenant; (2) he is their gracious Redeemer; (3) he calls Israel primarily to a relationship rather than to a code of conduct; (4) he calls them to obedience; (5) he assigns to them the mission of representing him to the world; (6) he reveals to them his indescribable glory and holiness; (7) he speaks to his people. Block, *For the Glory of God*, 43-44.

⁴¹ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 28.

(*miskam*), and his “sanctuary” (*miqdas*; Exod 25:8-9).⁴² Block says that this term, ‘sanctuary,’ reflects Yahweh’s transcendent holiness and identifies the tabernacle compound as sacred space. Like Mount Sinai itself, the tabernacle was rendered holy by Yahweh’s presence, symbolized by ‘glory’ (*kabod*).⁴³ Mark Johnston adds,

Moses’ declaration regarding Israel’s entry into the Promised Land that God himself would choose “the place” which would serve “as a dwelling for his Name” (Deut 12:11)—a thread that feeds through temple to church (Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4-10) and ultimately to its consummation in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:22)—provides an early keynote as to what the sanctuary was intended to represent.⁴⁴

While there is much debate surrounding the definition of Eden as a temple, there is much more broad consensus on the imagery of the tabernacle and temple’s recalling the Eden narrative. Block says that the tabernacle was designed as a “microcosm of Eden,” reflecting humanity’s alienation from God, God’s gracious determination to lift the effects of the curse, and a place of God’s blessing and rule.⁴⁵

God designated times and seasons for his people to worship him as Creator and Redeemer. Yoshiaki Hattori summarizes the contribution of Numbers and Deuteronomy, saying that they “can be viewed as the setting forth of the conditions and times in which God’s people did, or more commonly did not, worship God aright.”⁴⁶ Leviticus 23 designates all of the festivals as times of special Sabbaths. Throughout the Pentateuch, there are standards for daily, weekly, monthly, and seasonal worship. Many feasts corresponded to yearly harvest festivals as well as to Israel’s redemptive history.⁴⁷

⁴² Block, *For the Glory of God*, 302.

⁴³ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 302.

⁴⁴ Johnston, “A Biblical Theology of Worship,” 17.

⁴⁵ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 308.

⁴⁶ Yoshiaki Hattori, “Theology of Worship in the Old Testament,” in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, edited by D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 31.

⁴⁷ Peterson lays out these feasts as follows: “The Passover, followed by seven days of unleavened bread, was concerned with the barley harvest (Ex. 12:6; Lv. 23:5-8; Nu. 28:16-25; Dt. 16:1-8); Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, celebrated the wheat harvest (Ex. 34:26; Lv. 23:10-14; Nu. 28:26-31); and

Peterson says, “Like the tabernacle, the temple was to represent God’s rule over Israel and to be a reminder of his special presence among them, to bless them and make them a source of blessing to the nations.”⁴⁸ At the dedication of the temple, Solomon acknowledged that even as the highest heavens could not contain God, “how much less this temple I have built” (1 Kgs 8:27). Nevertheless, he prays that his “eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, my name shall be there” (7:28). God answered Solomon’s prayer, “I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time” (9:3). However, God made it clear that Solomon must walk with integrity of heart and that the people must obey God’s commands (9:4-6). “One of the prime aspects of [the king’s] shepherd/guardian role over Israel,” Due says, was “the preservation of true worship, including the removal of the high places and the promotion of true worship in the Temple.”⁴⁹

Jesus and the Transformation of Worship

The New Testament begins with the assurance that all of history has been moving towards Jesus Christ as its goal and that he is the final and definitive manifestation of God’s presence with his people.⁵⁰ The genealogies of Matthew show him to be the son of David, recalling the rise and fall of the Davidic empire, the history of Israel, and the reestablishment of Davidic rule in the person of Jesus. He is the son of Abraham, which recalls the blessing promised through Abraham to his people and through him to all nations (Matt 1:1-17).

Tabernacles (Booths) was at the same time the Feast of Ingathering, the general harvest festival (Ex. 23:16; Lv. 23:33-36; Dt. 16:13-15).” Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 37.

⁴⁸ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 43.

⁴⁹ Due, *Created for Worship*, 11.

⁵⁰ Borchert, *Worship in the New Testament*, chap 1, sec. 2, para. 1, Kindle.

Jesus is the Son of God. His divine Sonship takes on central significance from the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel.⁵¹ Matthew uses the term *proskunein*, the most commonly translated word for worship in the Scriptures, with Jesus as its object on ten occasions (2:2, 8, 11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:13; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9, 17). Further, Jesus is represented as the new Moses in John 1:17. Moses brought the law to Israel from God, but he could not bring the full revelation of the Father. This only the incarnate Son could do as the Word made flesh. Jesus "tabernacled" with his people (v. 14), just as God had done among the Israelites in the wilderness. Wright summarizes that the purpose of the exodus was to "lead to the knowledge, service and worship of the living God."⁵²

John records the cleansing of the temple at the outset of Jesus's ministry in connection with the Passover (2:13), which reminded the Israelites of the provision of God whereby he delivered them from judgment and from bondage to the Egyptians. Peterson traces the institution of the temple to Jesus as the new temple and to the ultimate purpose of deliverance: God's dwelling with his people and the people's freedom to enjoy God's presence.⁵³ The climax of the book of Exodus was the Sinai worship and covenant, and the clearly manifested presence of God with his people in the tabernacle. As Due comments, "Israel was brought *out* of Egypt to be brought *to* God in worship. Their release from bondage was for his glory."⁵⁴ God was glorified in the tabernacle and then in the temple to the extent that the people lived in obedience to his commands, reflecting his character.

In John 2, Jesus came to the temple, which was no longer accomplishing the purpose for which it had been instituted, to serve as the dwelling place of God. Instead, it

⁵¹ R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (London: Chapman, 1977), 135.

⁵² Wright, *The Mission of God*, 271.

⁵³ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 80-101.

⁵⁴ Due, *Created for Worship*, 125.

had become a place of trade. The place that was to remind the Israelites of their Creator and Redeemer had become a vehicle for building personal wealth. Jesus overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and “his disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me’” (v. 17). Such zeal consumed the Son because the house of the Lord was meant to reveal the glory of God but it no longer did.

John 4 (particularly v. 23) is a pivotal passage in worship studies, and one with a multitude of interpretations.⁵⁵ Due points out that Jesus’s request of the Samaritan woman for a drink of water was again an important backdrop to the account: “Instead of drawing physical water from the well of her ancestors, Jesus is inviting her to draw spiritual water from the well of his own Father, so that she might know him as her Father also, and thus come to worship him.”⁵⁶ Jesus turned the discussion from one of place and geography to one of spirit and truth. Borchert concurs that Jesus was “shift[ing] the question to the correct ‘spirit’ for worship.”⁵⁷

Other scholars attribute more to worship “in spirit,” and they seem to better take into account the immediate and following context. Worship must be “in spirit” in the sense that it wells up within us because, as Richard Averbeck says, “we have a spring of living water there.” The backdrop imagery and previous chapters make clear that this “spring of living water” is the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ Leon Morris defines “worship in truth” as that which is founded on the truth of the whole Word of God, not the limited and peculiar canon of the Samaritans.⁵⁹ Jesus explained that the temple has been replaced by his own

⁵⁵ John 4:23 reads, “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”

⁵⁶ Due, *Created for Worship*, 137.

⁵⁷ Borchert, *Worship in the New Testament*, chap. 4, sec. 5, para. 5. Kindle.

⁵⁸ Richard Averbeck, “Worshiping God in Spirit,” in *Authentic Worship: Hearing Scripture’s Voice, Applying Its Truths*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 82.

⁵⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 270-71.

person. The dwelling place of God is found in the person of Jesus. D. A. Carson notes the strong association of word and spirit in the Old Testament (e.g., Neh 9:20, 30; Ps 33:6; 147:18; Isa 59:21), saying, “It is possible that this connection is in the Evangelist’s mind, since Jesus the ‘Word made flesh’ (1:14) and ‘the truth’ (14:6) is also the one to whom God gave the Spirit without limit (3:34).”⁶⁰

In his baptism, Jesus is anointed and commissioned as prophet, priest, and king (Matt 1:13-17).⁶¹ In the Old Testament the kings of Israel were all anointed.⁶² The anointing of the king was intimately tied to the reception of the Spirit (1 Sam 10:10; 16:13; Ps 51:11). Each of these offices is tied to the reception of the Spirit and includes the responsibility to uphold and enable true worship.⁶³

Immediately after the recounting of Jesus’s anointing, Matthew records the temptation of Jesus (Matt 4:1-11). Donald Hagner ties this temptation to worship: “As in the very first account of testing, failed by Adam and Eve (Gen 3:1-7), the question centres on a choice between the will of Satan and the will of God, which involves implicitly the rendering of worship to one or the other.”⁶⁴ Carson comments on this passage: “In promising Jesus the kingdoms of the world in exchange for his worship, Satan was offering a path that side stepped the cross and introduced idolatry.”⁶⁵ Jesus triumphed over Satan and fulfilled the role that Israel could not fulfill in perfectly worshipping the Father. Scholarship finds great consensus in the view of Jesus as the focus

⁶⁰ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 226.

⁶¹ Due, *Created for Worship*, 11.

⁶² Due, *Created for Worship*, 9.

⁶³ Due, *Created for Worship*, 9-15.

⁶⁴ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33a (Waco: Word Books, 1993), 68.

⁶⁵ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 114.

of worship, the one who leads his people into worship, and the means by which God's people can enter into his presence to worship.

Worship in the Community of Jesus

The ascended Christ poured out the Holy Spirit on his disciples, and the Spirit indwelt them and united them (Acts 1-2). Quickly after the Spirit's coming during the Feast of First Fruits at Pentecost, the community of redeemed people began gathering. In Acts 2:42-47, Luke articulates four characteristics of an authentic worshipping community: the apostles teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42).⁶⁶

Scholars are virtually in complete unity that the church is marked by an orientation to the teaching and preaching of God's Word. Paul commanded Timothy to devote himself to "the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim 4:13). By "Scripture," Paul presumably meant the sacred writings of the Old Testament. As Paul's letters circulated, he wrote to various churches that they were to read his letters publicly (1 Thess 5:27; Col 4:16). In Justin Martyr's first *Apology*, he details that the weekly worship of Christians included "the memoirs of the Apostles or writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits."⁶⁷ Likewise, by the early third century, Hippolytus assumed that the first duty of Christians gathered for Christ's honor was to hear the Word.⁶⁸

After Jesus had ascended, he poured out his Spirit on the church. Christ's body became the dwelling place of God in the Spirit (1 Cor 3:16-17). As brothers and sisters in

⁶⁶ Gerald Borchert calls these four characteristics "a divinely intended synthesis for church life and worship." Borchert, *Worship in the New Testament*, chap 5, sec. 3, para. 5, Kindle.

⁶⁷ Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 67.

⁶⁸ Hippolytus, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, ed. Gregory Dix, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1968), 15.

Christ, the dwelling place of God is extended throughout the world by the Spirit-indwelt church. Peterson says, “The building that God is erecting on the foundation of Paul’s preaching about Jesus is a community of people indwelt by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21-22). Christians in union with Christ fulfill the temple ideal.”⁶⁹ The context for this true community worship is one of mutual ministry that finds its apex when Christians gather together. Peterson again highlights this: “The people of God continue to be the Spirit-filled community when they disperse and go about their daily affairs, but their identity as ‘the temple of the Lord’ finds particular expression when they gather together in Jesus’ name, to experience his presence and power in their midst.”⁷⁰ The glory of God is protected in our midst in this context of mutual ministry with one another. Paul exhorts, “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” (Col 3:16).

In Revelation, John offers a vision of the consummation, Christ’s return to set all things right. Ross states that this revelation “has been given to us, not only to inform us of how good it will be, but also to remind us of what worship must still do here on earth.”⁷¹ Patterns established throughout the Scriptures continue. Worship is in response to God’s revelation, and is also almost entirely communal, with scene after scene of heavenly worship around the throne.⁷² Worship in the Revelation is also a whole-person

⁶⁹ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 201.

⁷⁰ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 202.

⁷¹ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 474.

⁷² “One purpose of the church gathering on earth every week...is to be reminded of its heavenly identity by modeling its worship on the angels’ and the heavenly church’s worship of the exalted Lamb. This is why scenes of heavenly liturgy are woven throughout the Apocalypse.” G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 176.

activity, involving bodily expressions, shouting, singing and the playing of instruments, and a number of dramatic acts (Rev 4:1-5:14, 7:9-15, 11:15-19, 15:1-4, 19:1-8).

Summary

A number of themes emerge from this biblical overview guided by the scholarly consensus. First, worship is seen in the Scriptures as having been “initiated by God, rather than human beings. It is thus the appropriate response of human beings...”⁷³ This is a response to revelation. In God’s Word he reveals his character, his work, his promises, and his commands.

Second, worship is not only a response to revelation but also a response to redemption. As Peterson summarizes, “The worship of God’s people in the Bible is distinctive in that is regularly presented as the worship offered by those who have been redeemed.”⁷⁴ The act of redemption is central to the gathering of God’s people, from the Passover meal as the first memorial feast of the Israelites to the Christ event for the church in the initiatory rite of baptism and the continuing rite of the Lord’s Table.

Third, worship in response to God’s revelation by his redeemed is an entire life orientation. Worship is seen in formal or cultic settings, such as prescribed feasts and ceremonies at tabernacle and temple, as well as in informal activities, such as physical acts of submission and sacrifice and as a total heart attitude of service and reverent obedience.

Fourth, scholarship affirms the strong emphasis throughout Scripture on the significance of gathered worship and of the community engaged in worship together. A progression in Scripture is seen from sacred place (e.g., the tabernacle then the temple) to the person of Christ, who replaces the temple, and finally to the Spirit-baptized church,

⁷³ Due, *Created for Worship*, 71.

⁷⁴ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 26.

which extends the presence of Christ by the Spirit and becomes the new temple, the “dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:11-22). The community where God “dwells” or “meets with his people” is not in a sacred place but within a people. Worship has a community bent. The context of New Testament worship gatherings is mutual ministry and fellowship, a “sharing in Christ” (Heb 3:14). Not only are church members empowered by the Spirit with complementary gifts for God’s glory and “for the manifestation of the common good” (1 Cor 12:7), but also the overflow of the Spirit results in proclamation of praise to God as well as the teaching and admonishing of fellow believers. Individual worshipers are exhorted to come together in order to compound their praise and to inspire one another to glorify God with their lives.

Christian Discipleship

The underlying hypothesis of this research project is that there is a great deal of convergence between the aims of corporate worship and the markers of Christian discipleship. Though Jesus’s teaching and the first-century backdrop in which he lived and taught provide a great deal of allusion to the Old Testament, the overwhelming majority of literature on Christian discipleship begins with Jesus and the character and activity of a disciple as expressed fully by the New Testament.

Many discipleship resources draw from the witness of the Gospels and from the Epistles, offering practical principles for making disciples in the contemporary church. Many studies have focused on aspects of one or another theologically, though few have undertaken the subject comprehensively. Michael J. Wilkins is one of few who writes a detailed examination of the historical background of the term “disciple” (*mathetes*), the nature of the relationship between Jewish rabbis and their students in first-century Palestine, and the connections to the teachings of the remainder of the New Testament in *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). Jonathan Lunde has written a theology of covenantal discipleship in

Following Jesus, the Servant King: A Biblical Theology of Covenant Discipleship (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010). His thesis is that Christian discipleship has its roots in the realities issued through the new covenant. For that reason, he begins in the Old Testament covenants and then shows how Jesus fulfills those covenants and inaugurates the new covenant, empowering us to live out its realities.⁷⁵ These works pursue the idea of discipleship in the New Testament comprehensively and theologically.

Even more recently, others have taken sections of the New Testament, most notably the Gospels, to craft a theology of discipleship. Hans Bayer has undertaken a theology of discipleship entitled *A Theology of Mark: The Dynamic between Christology and Authentic Discipleship*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012). David Garland has chapters dedicated to discipleship in his work *A Theology of Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), as does Darrell Bock in his *A Theology of Luke-Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012). The following sections will reference these works heavily, along with a number of more narrowly focused articles, in order to ascertain common themes with the above definition of biblical worship.

The Gospels and Acts

The *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* defines a “disciple” (*mathetes*) as “someone who follows another person or another way of life and who submits himself to the discipline (teaching) of that leader or way.”⁷⁶ During Jesus’s earthly ministry, and during the days of the early church, the term *mathetes* was used most frequently to

⁷⁵ Lunde notes, however, that when referencing a comprehensive and theological study of discipleship, “pride of place goes to Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship*.” Jonathan Lunde, *Following Jesus, the Servant King: A Biblical Theology of Covenant Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), chap. 1, sec. 3, para. 4, Kindle.

⁷⁶ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988), 1:629.

designate one of Jesus's followers.⁷⁷ *Mathetes* appears 262 times in the New Testament, only in the Gospels and Acts. Bock says the term "describes a person who is dependent on and instructed by Jesus, or who at least appears to be in such a position."⁷⁸ Wilkins is more specific in his definition: "A disciple of Jesus is one who has come to Jesus for eternal life, has claimed Jesus as Savior and God, and has embarked upon the life of following Jesus."⁷⁹

The Gospel accounts witness to twelve disciples who were called by Jesus into a special relationship with him. They were called to leave everything and follow Christ in order to join with him in proclaiming the message of the kingdom of God (Matt 10:1-15). Besides the Twelve, there were other disciples of Christ. A group of seventy was appointed on a missionary journey (Luke 10:1-20). They undertook the same mission that Jesus did, had the same authority bestowed upon them that Jesus gave to the Twelve (10:19), and preached the same message (10:9). There were also a group of women who followed Jesus (8:1-3). Hans Kvalbein says, "We should distinguish between the disciples in a narrow sense—those who literally followed Jesus—and a broader group of adherents and sympathizers."⁸⁰

The scholars agree on a number of necessary elements of Christian discipleship. First, God initiates discipleship through the call of Christ and the enabling of the Spirit. In unpacking Jesus's teaching on the dimensions of discipleship, Wilkins highlights Jesus's encounter with Nicodemus to show that growth as a disciple is

⁷⁷ M. J. Wilkins, "Disciple. Discipleship," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 175.

⁷⁸ Darrell Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 315.

⁷⁹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), chap. 2, sec. 5, para. 3, Kindle.

⁸⁰ Hans Kvalbein, "Go Therefore and Make Disciples . . . The Concept of Discipleship in the New Testament," *Themelios* 13, no. 2 (January 1988): 50.

dependent upon regeneration through the Spirit (John 3:1-8). Change needs to happen from within, produced by the Spirit of God.⁸¹ The disciples of Christ responded to Jesus's call to discipleship, and their growth as disciples was likewise dependent on him. Lunde speaks of the person and teaching of Jesus as the lens through which first-century Jewish followers were to understand all previous instruction.⁸² Garland concurs: "Jesus is not only the initiator of discipleship but the one who will mold them to will and to act according to his purpose."⁸³

Second, Christ's calling to his disciples was costly. Disciples of Christ continue to count the cost of being a disciple. They must deny themselves, take up their crosses daily, and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). There is an emphasis in Jesus's teaching on daily, continual discipleship. Wilkins continues, "The same cost that characterized entrance to discipleship was to characterize the life of discipleship. Growth as a disciple came through continually giving allegiance to Jesus and following the will of the Father."⁸⁴ Commenting on Jesus's seemingly harsh words to the disciple who desired to first bury his father before he followed his Master (Matthew 8:22), Jack Kingsbury says, "In the life of discipleship, divided loyalties, even when rooted in religion and ancient custom, pose an unacceptable threat to the allegiance due to Jesus alone."⁸⁵

Third, the pursuit of discipleship in Christ is adherence to the teaching of Christ. Wilkins states, "A definitive objective of Jesus' form of discipleship is that his disciples will know his teaching, which when obeyed, will set them free from the

⁸¹ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, chap. 7, sec. 3, para. 10, Kindle.

⁸² Lunde, *Following Jesus, the Servant King*, Chap. 8, sec. 2, para. 1, Kindle.

⁸³ David E. Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 391.

⁸⁴ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, chap. 7, sec. 3, para. 13, Kindle.

⁸⁵ Jack Dean Kingsbury, "On Following Jesus: The 'Eager' Scribe and the 'Reluctant' Disciple (Matthew 8:18-22)," *New Testament Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 1988): 56.

bondage of sin (John 8:31-32).⁸⁶ Knowing the teaching alone, however, is not enough. Disciples are not merely learners but are called to “obey” or “observe” all things that Christ commanded (Matt 28:20). Kvalbein says, “A disciple learns by (a) hearing his Master, and (b) doing like his Master.”⁸⁷

Though scholars come from different starting points, there is strong consensus that discipleship is all-encompassing, continual, and centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ. From his covenantal framework, Lunde identifies Jesus as the kingly fulfillment of the Davidic covenant and his disciples as the ones who are commanded to “follow him in a discipleship that expresses the righteousness of God.”⁸⁸ Bock summarizes his reflections on Luke’s presentation of discipleship as “a full vocation. Nothing else comes ahead of it.”⁸⁹ Bayer summarizes the all-encompassing nature of discipleship commitment through eight spiritual and ethical qualities that emerge from the Gospel of Mark.⁹⁰ Wilkins says that Jesus’s teachings created the basis for an ethic that would sustain the disciples during his earthly ministry as well as beyond it. This ethical life was characterized by an ultimate ideal, exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-7:28), the importance of thought and motives as well as actions, love as the central theme of the disciple’s life, and the accountability of the disciples for their actions.⁹¹ And Theodore Jennings summarizes John Wesley’s goal of discipleship, which

⁸⁶ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, chap. 7, sec. 3, para. 13, Kindle.

⁸⁷ Kvalbein, “Go Therefore and Make Disciples,” 49. He continues, “Jesus is seen as a teacher not only through his words, but also through actions. He doesn’t only give a ‘doctrine,’ but also a new self-understanding and a new life-style to be preserved by his followers.”

⁸⁸ Lunde, *Following Jesus, the Servant King*, “The Answers to the “What” Question,” sec. 1, para. 2, Kindle.

⁸⁹ Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, 321.

⁹⁰ Those qualities are as follows: (1) surrender to God’s will (Mark 8:34-37), (1) faith in God (11:22-24), (3) prayer (11:25), (4) watching over the heart (4:1-20; 7:14-23), (5) humility and service (9:33-41; 10:42-44), (6) forgiveness (11:25), (7) withstanding temptation (10:30; 13:9-13, 33-37), and (8) confessing Christ (8:38; 13:10). Hans Bayer, *A Theology of Mark: The Dynamic between Christology and Authentic Discipleship*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012), 99-124.

⁹¹ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, chap. 7, sec. 3, para. 17, Kindle.

reflected Wesley's assessment of Jesus's call to the disciples in the Gospels: "love of God and neighbor transforming every sphere of life."⁹²

Fourth, Jesus's discipleship training of the Twelve took place in a sustained community context. Throughout the Gospels and Acts, the plural "disciples" is normally used. Wilkins says that such usage expresses an important point: "Individual disciples are always seen in conjunction with the community of disciples, whether as Jesus' intimate companions, or as the church."⁹³ Bayer describes discipleship as "by no means merely individual or personal, but, very centrally, reciprocal and communal in nature."⁹⁴ He continues,

At the very foundation of discipleship lies the fact that Jesus never trains merely one disciple by himself or herself. Rather, from the start, Jesus engages a group of disciples. Immediately, then, there is not only a teaching dimension between Jesus and the respective disciple, but also a horizontal reciprocal teaching and learning dynamic among the disciples. Because Jesus is present among his disciples today by means of his Spirit, that same pattern is perpetuated in the twenty-first century.⁹⁵

Wilkins likewise characterizes Jesus's form of discipleship as including a complex balance of individualism and community: "The call to each was an individual call, and yet community can be seen everywhere in the gospels."⁹⁶ The redeemed life is one lived in community. Jennings says, "One of the most striking characteristics of discipleship is that the disciples constitute an egalitarian community."⁹⁷

In the book of Acts, the term "disciple" appears twenty-eight times. Luke also uses the terms believers, brothers/sisters, and saints interchangeably, indicating that they

⁹² Theodore W. Jennings Jr., "The Meaning of Discipleship in Wesley and the New Testament," *Quarterly Review* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 9.

⁹³ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, chap. 13, sec. 3, para. 1, Kindle.

⁹⁴ Bayer, *A Theology of Mark*, 125.

⁹⁵ Bayer, *A Theology of Mark*, 125.

⁹⁶ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, chap. 7, sec. 3, para. 20, Kindle.

⁹⁷ Jennings, "Discipleship in Wesley and the New Testament," 13.

were an equivalent group of people.⁹⁸ Luke also makes it clear that, as Robert Meye states, “The word ‘disciples’ in the book of Acts to describe the post-Easter believers intimately associated together as the new community of faith, the church.”⁹⁹

The Epistles

The Epistles contain no references to the term *mathetes*. There is widespread consensus among scholars that *mathetes* continued to be an appropriate word to describe adherents to the Master, but since he was no longer present, other terms came naturally into use that emphasized the relationships of the disciples to their risen Lord as well as to the new community of faith and the larger society.¹⁰⁰ In the Epistles, there is a clear transition in terminology from “disciple” to “believer,” which Wilkins says “indicates how the church understood the connection between the historical Jesus and the risen Christ: the follower of Jesus has passed from being a ‘disciple’ who follows Jesus around in a physical sense to being a ‘believer’ who is a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).”¹⁰¹

At the same time, the term “disciple” continued to be an appropriate term for those who follow Christ, and it seems increasingly so since the Epistles were written earlier than the Gospels and Acts.¹⁰² The term was still relevant, and the presence and

⁹⁸ George P. Gould, “Disciple,” in *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1906), 1:457.

⁹⁹ Robert P. Meye, “Disciple,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:948.

¹⁰⁰ Avery Dulles, “Discipleship,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: MacMillan, 1987), 4:361-64; Charles H. Talbert, “Discipleship in Luke-Acts,” in *Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 62.

¹⁰¹ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, chap. 15, sec. 1, para. 4, Kindle. He continues, “Hence, the true believer is one who, although he or she can now no longer physically follow Jesus around, focuses his or her belief on the reality of a risen Lord and Savior, exercises personal faith unto salvation, and is characterized by a lifestyle consistent with apostolic teaching concerning the Christian life. This is truly a continuation of the concept of discipleship that Jesus taught in his earthly ministry.”

¹⁰² According to A. B. Luter Jr., “Since the Epistles focus on the church rather than on individual believers, the absence of the word disciple should be expected.” A. B. Luter Jr., “Discipleship in the Church,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (July-September 1980): 269. Longenecker also suggests, “The increased frequency of the terms (both ‘disciple’ and ‘follower’) in our canonical Gospels and (to some extent) in Acts vis-à-vis their appearance in Paul’s letters, which were written earlier, seems to suggest that

task of discipleship had not changed, but the demands had been transformed. As Kvalbein states, “It should be evident that the content of ‘following’ Jesus and being his ‘disciple’ has new content when it no longer refers to a relationship with a bodily present Master but the risen, invisible Lord.”¹⁰³

Whereas discipleship implied community in the time of Jesus, it becomes the necessary context in the age of the Spirit. As James G. Samra says, “After the Spirit comes, no discipleship takes place outside the communities of faith and the goal of the communities themselves is to make people like Christ (Eph 4:13). Perhaps the reason Jesus made provision for both the Spirit and for the church was the absolute necessity of both for accomplishing discipleship.”¹⁰⁴ This community of disciples is called to be self-replicating, that is, continually making more disciples of Christ. Kvalbein refers to “discipleship” as “a dynamic concept. It implies multiplication.”¹⁰⁵

Summary

A disciple of Jesus Christ is called by Christ to follow him. The disciple is called to a way of life that expresses reverence for Christ and obeys his teachings. This obedience is more than just “lip-service”; it also involves heart attitudes and a new way of thinking. Jesus calls his disciples to sacrifice and to a radical commitment to deny

this religious usage was increasing during the time the New Testament was written.” Richard N. Longenecker, ed., introduction to *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 4.

¹⁰³ Kvalbein, “Go Therefore and Make Disciples,” 50. He continues, “The radical demands for the disciples in the ministry of Jesus are not simply abandoned in the early church. They are transformed for a new situation where literal ‘following’ is no longer possible.”

¹⁰⁴ James G. Samra, “A Biblical View of Discipleship,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (April-June 2003): 223.

¹⁰⁵ Kvalbein, “Go Therefore and Make Disciples,” 52. Kvalbein refers to the charge to the disciples in Matt 28:19 to themselves make disciples of all nations. He then connects that expansion of discipleship to all nations to Paul’s words in 2 Cor 5:18, which closely connect the gift of being reconciled with God to the ministry of reconciliation: “Being a disciple is to become the co-worker of Christ in his world-wide mission.”

oneself daily and take up one's cross in order to follow him fully. This call to discipleship is to be engaged together with other disciples.

There are great areas of convergence between a biblical theology of worship and a definition of Christian discipleship. God's revelation is the necessary prompter and initiator of Christian worship and discipleship. Redemption is the entrance into New Testament discipleship and the model for our continual obedience and life together as a community (Eph 4:32).¹⁰⁶ Community is the necessary climate and context for both worship and discipleship.

Having explored the themes of a biblical theology of worship and a definition of Christian discipleship, I will now consider the historical liturgy of the church. Has the church historically incorporated the above understanding of worship into their corporate gatherings, and if so, to what extent? Have decisions concerning liturgy been made in view of theologically informed worship and discipleship priorities, and if so, to what extent? The next section will explore these questions.

Liturgical History

Scott Aniol states that the word *leitourgia* is “a compound word that means “the work (*ergon*) of the people (*laos*).” From this compound word comes the English term “liturgy,” which denotes habitual, communal, ritual practices.¹⁰⁷

The *Oxford History of Christian Worship* defines liturgy as a language:

Christian ritual constitutes a complex symbolic system—employing verbal, gestural, and material signs—by which the Church and the churches explore, describe, interpret, and fashion reality; express and form their thoughts, emotions, and values;

¹⁰⁶ Mark Chan says, “As redeemed people bought with the price of Christ’s blood, we are to mirror that self-sacrificial love that prompted our redeemer to give his life.” Mark L. Y. Chan, “The Gospel and the Achievement of the Cross,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 1 (2009), 31.

¹⁰⁷ Scott Aniol, “Practice Makes Perfect: Corporate Worship and the Formation of Spiritual Virtue,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 10, no. 1 (2017): 93.

and communicate across time and space in ways that both build and convey traditions as well as both allowing and reflecting social relations in the present.¹⁰⁸

This statement speaks about liturgy in a number of significant ways. Liturgy is more complex than simply one expression of worship, such as music or Scripture reading. It involves not only the *words* that are used but also *aesthetics* and *bodily engagement*. Liturgy is a language that involves both “the church and churches”—that is, there is a *universal* component and *uniqueness* in each local context, especially across different denominations. Liturgy is a language for both *expressing* and *forming* thoughts about the world through a Christian lens. Lastly, as a language, liturgy inherently communicates *from history* and *for the present*. These four elements as juxtaposed in the statement above are all worthy of reflection.

A consideration of liturgy and its interaction with worship practice and discipleship process will focus on the rhythms and elements of the weekly corporate worship gathering. However, the annual rhythm of worship is significant as well. Thomas Talley traces the development of the liturgical year back to Israel’s exodus from Egypt.¹⁰⁹ The Passover provided the cultic context for the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples. Robert Webber says, “While every Sunday is a remembrance of the death and resurrection and an anticipation of the end of history and the transfigured world, Christian year spirituality is ordered by the succession of Sundays that enter into the ministry, death and resurrection, and coming again of our Lord.”¹¹⁰ Time revolves around the person and work of Jesus.

¹⁰⁸ Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, eds., *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 16.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), 1.

¹¹⁰ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Time (Ancient-Future): Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), chap. 1, “conclusion,” para. 4, Kindle.

In his work “The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship,” Bradshaw builds on Talley’s work and also challenges the notion that the annual calendar has been cohesive and universally recognized throughout Christendom. He concludes, “the further one digs into the primary sources, the more it is diversity rather than uniformity which is encountered in the first few centuries.”¹¹¹ Matthew Westerholm likewise traces the history of the calendar, showing it to be made up of diverse and contested practices, local interpretations of annual traditions that now constitute the liturgical year.¹¹² He encourages local pastors to evaluate the local rhythms and unique needs in their contexts, and to appropriate the annual calendar as a discipleship tool.

Of the corporate worship service, Gregg Allison says “the church has historically gathered together regularly (at least every Sunday, if not more frequently) for the purpose of worship.”¹¹³ Records show that as early as the second century, the church divided its weekly worship into two major segments: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Upper Room.¹¹⁴ The Liturgy of the Word generally refers to the part of the worship service that culminates in preaching, and the Liturgy of the Upper Room is the part that included the Lord’s Supper.¹¹⁵

Bryan Chappell examines six different liturgies of church history: (1) the Roman Catholic liturgy (pre-1570), which Chappell says is foundational for most subsequent liturgies in Western culture; (2) the Lutheran liturgy (ca. 1526); (3) the

¹¹¹ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search For the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Studies of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 192.

¹¹² Matthew D. Westerholm, “‘Lent it Go’: The Liturgical Calendar and Low Church Tradition” (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, California, November 20-22, 2019).

¹¹³ Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology: an Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 659.

¹¹⁴ John M. Barkley, *Worship of the Reformed Church* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1967), 41.

¹¹⁵ Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 19.

Reformed liturgy (ca. 1542); (4) the Westminster liturgy (ca. 1645); (5) Rayburn's liturgy (ca. 1980); and (6) the modern liturgy. Chappell identifies some common components across the historical liturgies. In adoration, "each of the traditions begins worship with recognition of the greatness and goodness of God."¹¹⁶ Adoration is followed by confession, as in Isaiah 6:5, where the revelation of the holy God caused Isaiah to exclaim "Woe is me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

All of the liturgies follow up a confession with an assurance of the believer's pardon by God. In the Catholic liturgy, the *Kyrie* is followed by the *Gloria*, whose words include, "Lord Jesus Christ, only Son to the Father, Lord Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world."¹¹⁷ Next is thanksgiving, an opportunity for believers to express their thanksgiving to God for his grace. Having thanked God, the church enters a time of petition, where believers offer specific prayers for others. Next is scriptural instruction. The final movement consists of a charge and blessing.

There are certainly nuances involved in each liturgical expression that reflect theological leanings and preferences. However, there is a common sequence of these liturgies, and as Chappell says, it describes "the progress of the gospel in the life of an individual."¹¹⁸ Every week, the order of service in churches, across denominations and throughout history, has followed the contours of the gospel. Chappell's conclusion is that there is a strategy to the liturgy: "The components of the worship service prior to and after the Sermon lead the heart through various stages of awe, humility, assurance, and thanksgiving to make us receptive and responsive to the instruction of the Word."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Chappell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 86.

¹¹⁷ Chappell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 90.

¹¹⁸ Chappell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 99.

¹¹⁹ Chappell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 20.

Early on in the life of the church, the Scriptures became a key component of the worship service, and central to the liturgy. Formal worship services included the reading of the Scriptures as a high priority.¹²⁰ Andrew McGowan comments, “Among the elements of Jewish communal prayer and ritual that were influential in earliest Christianity, the reading and interpretation of Scripture may be the most significant, partly because those activities were the real center of the earliest synagogue life.”¹²¹ Kevin Vanhoozer says that the preached word and exposition of theology functions as a means both of worship and discipleship in “shaping the body of Christ’s collective imagination.” Theology shows the church that everything is governed by the “gospel message at the heart of the master story that unifies Scripture.”¹²²

Just as Scripture has been central to liturgy, the two ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, have both been central features in church practice since the New Testament.¹²³ These two ordinances of the church reenact the Christ event, are themselves an act of allegiance to the Savior, and draw the community together.

In regard to baptism, the initiatory rite of the church, Donald Bridge and David Phypers highlight the New Testament’s teaching this way:

Baptism is a sign and means of repentance (Acts 2:38): Baptism and the seal of the Spirit occur concurrently (1 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:1, 4:30): Baptism demonstrates that salvation is all of grace (Titus 3:4-5). Baptism is a participation in the death and

¹²⁰ For a thorough exploration of the biblical roots of reading Scripture orally in worship, see Daniel I. Block, “That They May Hear: Biblical Foundations for the Oral Reading of Scripture in Worship,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012): 5-34.

¹²¹ Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Christian Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 68.

¹²² Kevin Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers: A Pastor’s Guide to Making Disciples through Scripture and Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 9. Vanhoozer continues by saying that theology better enables believers “to critically examine the images and stories by which Christians live in light of the biblical images and stories by which they ought to live.”

¹²³ Steven A. McKinion states, “Baptism was practiced universally in the early church from the New Testament forwards. For those Christians who came after the NT period, baptism remained an essential component of the church’s life and practice.” Steven A. McKinion, “Baptism in the Patristic Writings,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 163.

resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12). Baptism is our entry into the church (2 Cor 12:13). Baptism is oriented toward the eschaton (Titus 3:5-7).¹²⁴

James K. A. Smith says that baptism “both makes and signifies a social reality, which is why it is situated in the context of gathered worship.”¹²⁵ In commenting on I Corinthians 12:13, Thomas Schreiner says baptism in water and the Spirit is “the signature event for Christians, marking them out as members of the people of God.”¹²⁶ Baptism is an identification of allegiance to Jesus and of commitment to one another under Jesus.

Likewise, the Lord’s Supper is an ordinance that celebrates Jesus as the focus of the gathering. When the church celebrates Communion, it is “the real and spiritual presence of [the] crucified, risen, and exalted Christ who communes with His faithful followers at the Table of the Lord.”¹²⁷ It is also a feast of forgiveness and reconciliation. As Smith says, “The Supper is a gracious communing with a forgiving God; but it is also a supper we eat with one another, and that too will require forgiveness. God’s design for human flourishing cannot be satisfied in isolation.”¹²⁸ By enacting the meal, Jesus is drawing his people into the life in community to which he is calling them. Melvin Tinker states that this *anamnesis* (“remembrance”) is an active reenactment of the death of

¹²⁴ Donald Bridge and David Phipers, *The Water That Divides* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 15-24.

¹²⁵ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation, Cultural Liturgies*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 184.

¹²⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Disciples,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 72.

¹²⁷ Bruce Ware, “The Meaning of the Lord’s Supper in the Theology of Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), in *The Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ Until He Comes*, Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 236.

¹²⁸ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 201.

Christ that is exactly similar to the way in which the Jews at the celebration of the Passover recalled their deliverance from Egypt.¹²⁹

The weekly corporate formalized gathering of Christian disciples was historically prepared for the purpose of praise, remembrance, saturation in the Scriptures, mutual edification, and a recommitment to the discipleship task. The next section will examine the current scholarship to see how scholars appropriate the implications of these historical precedents and draw these lines between worship liturgy and Christian disciple-making.

Pastoral Worship Planning

A number of recent works have sought to draw connections between corporate worship and discipleship as it relates to liturgy. Among the most notable is the trilogy of books by James K. A. Smith. In his second volume, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Smith states his premise: “The renewal of the church’s worship hinges on an understanding of human beings as ‘liturgical animals,’ creatures who can’t *not* worship and who are fundamentally formed by worship practices.”¹³⁰ He says that liturgies are formative because they shape not only what we know but primarily what we love. With this liturgical anthropology as a backdrop, Smith talks about the formative power of communally embodied rhythms or practices, routines, and rituals that shape desires and longings. He calls for intentionality in liturgical practices in both the church and the Christian university because “they are unique sites for intentional Christian formation and because they both exist for *sending*.”¹³¹ It is for this reason that Smith

¹²⁹ Melvin Tinker, “Last Supper/Lord’s Supper: More Than a Parable in Action?,” *Themelios* 26, no. 2 (2001): 21.

¹³⁰ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works, Cultural Liturgies*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 3.

¹³¹ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 4.

thinks that the construction and articulation of a Christian worldview is inadequate. The goal is that believers in Christ become not only spectators, or observers of the world, but also actors in the world as citizens of Christ's kingdom.

In place of the worldview construct, Smith follows Charles Taylor and uses the term "social imaginary." He defines "imagination" as "a quasi-faculty whereby we construe the world on a precognitive level, on a register that is fundamentally aesthetic precisely because it is so closely tied to the body," or "an everyday capacity for unconscious 'understanding' of the world."¹³² Because this idea of "imagination" operates at a precognitive level, in the affective and aesthetic domain, Smith says that "liturgies are compressed, performed narratives that recruit the imagination through the body."¹³³ He calls for a more intentioned liturgy and points to the importance of the arts in worship.

This idea of humans' being formed by worship practice was previously articulated by Debra Murphy, who says that knowledge demands transformation. She says that for Augustine, "knowledge that Christians aspire to is knowledge of God and knowledge of self, and that that knowledge cannot leave us unchanged." In Murphy's view, knowledge as intimately connected to action, doing, practice, habit, and ritual means that "what we know can not be separated from who we are or within the confessional language of the church, who we hope to be." She attempts to construct a "doxological, liturgical, eucharistic account of knowledge."¹³⁴ This knowledge imparted through worship is not simply a grasping of the data by the intellect but is—at its heart—bodily and performative.

¹³² Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 16.

¹³³ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 20.

¹³⁴ Debra Dean Murphy, "Worship as Catechesis: Knowledge, Desire, and Christian Formation," *Theology Today* 58, no. 3 (October 2001): 323-24.

For Murphy, Smith, and others in this strain, to say that worship is a form of knowledge is not to advocate for a merely utilitarian view of worship in order to teach. As Gwen Kennedy Neville and John Westerhoff point out, “Some religious educators have made the serious mistake of speaking of teaching by or with the liturgy, thereby reducing the liturgy to a didactic act. To use the liturgy is to do it violence.”¹³⁵ Instead, the premise underlying this scholarship—as well as this study—is that corporate worship indeed forms disciples. That is, as Murphy says, “for Christians, worship is the site at which our formation and education are initiated and completed (insofar as they can ever be complete). What we do, how we act in the liturgical assembly shapes us in particular and powerful ways and is both formative of identity and catechetical in the most basic sense.”¹³⁶

The ideas put forth by the preceding authors, and most compellingly by Smith, recognize the important connection between corporate worship and discipleship, a connection that is central to this project. However, the above works de-emphasize and almost eschew the necessity of teaching in the church. Smith calls the church to affirm the “passional” nature of humanity as emotional, desiring beings, and then seek to redirect those desires. He cautions that focusing on propositional teaching is like “pouring water on our head to put out a fire in our heart.”¹³⁷ This contradicts Paul’s directive that the believer be trained in “the words of the faith” and in “good doctrine” (I Tim 4:6). Formative corporate worship need not be devoid of propositional truth. These influential works are truly foundational to a right view of worship and discipleship, but must be partnered with others that maintain the importance of sound teaching.

¹³⁵ Gwen Kennedy Neville and John H. Westerhoff, *Learning through Liturgy* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 91.

¹³⁶ Murphy, “Worship as Catechesis,” 325.

¹³⁷ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 76.

Paul Richardson better recognizes the importance of intentional instruction in his article “Spiritual Formation in Corporate Worship.” He shows the link between liturgy and formation as expressed in the historic motto *lex orandi, lex credenda* (“the word/rule/law of prayer is the word/rule/law of belief”). This motto asserts that our prayer not only expresses one’s faith but also forms one’s theology. Paul Richardson comments on *lex orandi, lex credenda*, stating that how one worships shapes how they live and that corporate worship forms corporate spirituality.¹³⁸ That is, that the believer’s greatest need is to understand and express his/her identity as part of the body of Christ and that the corporate worship gathering uniquely accomplishes this formation of corporate identity. Richardson appeals to Romans 12, that in spiritual worship, believers are transformed to use their varied gifts and to practice ethical behavior towards one another.¹³⁹ Though he stops short of true practical application, Richardson makes a number of general directives for how churches might engage worship in order to be formed more fully as the body of Christ, and he offers a compendium of goals to which the church can aspire.¹⁴⁰

H. Wayne Johnson also makes this vital connection between corporate gathering and discipleship in practical terms, and in connection with sound teaching. He says, “We are called to actively pursue Christian formation through the practice of corporate worship and edification. What we do on a Sunday morning matters for our

¹³⁸ Paul A. Richardson, “Spiritual Formation in Corporate Worship,” *Review and Expositor* 96, no. 4 (1999): 519.

¹³⁹ Rom 12 is a key passage for many in this regard. Evan Hock comments, “As worship and love to God are intricately linked, ethics, which also encompasses love to God, has a doxological character.” Evan C. Hock, “Theology and Ethics,” *Reformation and Revival* 5, no. 4 (1996): 45. See also David Peterson, “Worship and Ethics in Romans 12,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44 (1993): 272-81.

¹⁴⁰ Richardson states, “Worship must be intentional; theological, or God-centered; relational; biblical; counter-cultural; functional; ‘ordinance-al’; logical; dialogical; integrative; ethical; inclusive; liturgical; and aesthetic.” Richardson, “Spiritual Formation in Corporate Worship,” 523-32.

spiritual formation.”¹⁴¹ Johnson calls corporate worship a social practice that embodies and shapes theology; consequently, he speaks against the typical “concert and a sermon” approach that weakens the link between Word and worship and makes music the vehicle for both revelation of God and response to God. Instead, Johnson advocates specifically for public corporate Scripture reading and for purposed corporate prayer.¹⁴²

Aniol synthesizes this recent scholarship most compellingly in a recent article, arguing that “corporate worship is one of the primary means of making disciples through the ritual formation of spiritual virtue.”¹⁴³ The church’s mission is to make disciples, those who are to observe all that Christ commanded (Matt 28:20), which entails both beliefs and behaviors. With his definitions, Aniol weds Smith and Murphy’s principles of worship with the necessity of accompanying instruction. Teaching is not only data transmission; it also involves imparting a skillset.¹⁴⁴ To say that teaching is not mere doctrine does not imply that doctrine is unimportant, however. As Alister McGrath states, “The authority of Jesus’ moral and religious teaching rests upon a doctrinal foundation.”¹⁴⁵

Aniol echoes Smith’s assertion that people act not primarily based on the knowledge in their minds but on the inclination of their hearts.¹⁴⁶ As Jonathan Edwards says, “The Author of the human nature has not only given affections to men, but has

¹⁴¹ H. Wayne Johnson, “Practicing Theology on a Sunday Morning: Corporate Worship as Spiritual Formation,” *Trinity Journal* 31 (2010): 1.

¹⁴² Johnson, “Practicing Theology on a Sunday Morning,” 1-18.

¹⁴³ Aniol, “Practice Makes Perfect,” 93.

¹⁴⁴ Aniol, “Practice Makes Perfect,” 94.

¹⁴⁵ Alister E. McGrath, “Doctrine and Ethics,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 2 (1991): 148.

¹⁴⁶ Aniol, “Practice Makes Perfect,” 95. The foundation of Smith’s description of “cultural liturgies” is the premise that humans are “primarily desiring animals rather than thinking things” (Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 26).

made ‘em very much the spring of men’s actions.’¹⁴⁷ C. S. Lewis likewise describes the “chest,” or the higher inclinations, as “emotions organized by trained habits into stable sentiments.”¹⁴⁸ Aniol says that “spiritual virtue is shaped by cultivation of inclinations through habitual behavior in community.”¹⁴⁹ This habitual behavior of corporate worship effectively forms people as it shapes their inclinations towards consistent behavioral practices outside the gathered assembly. For this reason, Aniol says that “pastors should carefully consider how the liturgies of their churches shape the inclinations and therefore the lives, of their church members.”¹⁵⁰ He advocates strongly for a liturgy that follows the contours of the gospel in order to inform people’s “liturgies of life” and thus inform their moral behavior.

Alexis Abernethy recently executed a study with others from Fuller Seminary to identify the key processes that might contribute to the worship leader’s spiritual engagement and embodiment.¹⁵¹ The investigation operated from the premise that corporate worship and edification are key practices that contribute to Christian formation. The study utilized S. J. Sandage and F. L. Shults’s relational model of spiritual formation, which emphasizes the reciprocal influence of spirituality and interpersonal relationships and the social dimensions of worship.¹⁵² Twenty-six exemplar worship leaders were nominated by leaders and professors in Christian worship according to criteria that

¹⁴⁷ Jonathan Edwards, “A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections,” in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 144.

¹⁴⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Harper One, 2001), 24.

¹⁴⁹ Aniol, “Practice Makes Perfect,” 97.

¹⁵⁰ Aniol, “Practice Makes Perfect,” 98-103.

¹⁵¹ Alexis D. Abernethy et al., “Corporate Worship and Spiritual Formation: Insights from Worship Leaders,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 34, no. 3 (2015): 266-79.

¹⁵² S. J. Sandage and F. L. Shults, “Relational Spirituality and Transformation: A Relational Integration Model,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 26 (2007): 261-69.

centered on the leaders' responsiveness and openness to God and congregation, proficiency in teaching and leading in worship, and ability to articulate their experience in an interview setting.¹⁵³ The study focused on the role of the worship leader, relational spirituality, and attention to the deep structure of worship. Abernethy et al. concluded, "What happens in our minds, bodies and spirit not only influence others, but influence our own spiritual formation. In addition, patients, as well as fellow worshippers, respond to these cues."¹⁵⁴

Abernethy's work has import in uncovering the attitudes and spiritual development of those who lead worship gatherings. However it is a study primarily about the "psychology of religion," and not the theology of worship and how that theology informs corporate gatherings and results in the discipleship of God's people.¹⁵⁵

Other works that emphasize the practical application of worship as catechesis have focused on the intersection between the arts, theology, and the church. *The Beauty of God* features essays that discuss the power of music, the visual arts, and words to facilitate response to the Creator and Redeemer. The structure of the book follows the biblical metanarrative and from many angles affirms the thesis that "through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God reaffirmed the dignity of creation and the cultural vocation of human beings."¹⁵⁶ John Witvliet says, "The goal of the liturgical artist is not to generate artworks that merely 'connect' with people, but rather to enable them, corporately, to participate in acts of Trinitarian covenantal renewal."¹⁵⁷ Jeremy

¹⁵³ Abernethy et al., "Corporate Worship and Spiritual Formation," 270.

¹⁵⁴ Abernethy et al., "Corporate Worship and Spiritual Formation," 277.

¹⁵⁵ Abernethy et al., "Corporate Worship and Spiritual Formation," 266.

¹⁵⁶ Daniel J. Treier, Mark Husbands, and Roger Lundon, eds., *The Beauty of God: Theology and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 9.

¹⁵⁷ John Witvliet, "The Worship: How Can Art Serve the Corporate Worship of the Church?," in *For the Beauty of the Church: Casting a Vision for the Arts*, ed. David O. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 56.

Begbie explores the sense of “transcendence” that the arts aspire, arguing that God’s transcendence is explicitly Trinitarian. Artists participate in creativity through the Holy Spirit, in what has been embodied for us in Christ. In this participation, artists affirm their own creatureliness and Christ’s otherness.¹⁵⁸

There are many valuable resources that link a biblical theology of worship to the planning of the liturgy. One of the best recent examples is Constance Cherry’s *The Worship Architect*, in which Cherry articulates the belief that “services established on the rock-solid foundation of biblical principles and cultural implications for worship will continue to provide the ways and means to encounter God while surviving the forceful winds of change and confusion that surround us in every age.”¹⁵⁹ Cherry’s biblical themes that translate anchoring principles for Christian worship line up well with the themes discussed in this thesis thus far: worship is centered on God’s salvation; worship is patterned in God’s revelation and believers’ response; worship is covenantal in nature (i.e., built on a relationship between God and his people); worship is corporate in nature; worship is Trinitarian in nature; worship is a transformational journey.¹⁶⁰

Cherry also outlines how worship is centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ. She advocates for a dialogical method of worship planning, emphasizing that a corporate worship gathering is indeed gospel-shaped: “Every Sunday there is an underlying rhythm in motion: God approaches us, God reveals truth, we respond to the invitation to accept the demands of the gospel, and we are sent out into the world.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Jeremy Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts: Bearing Witness to the Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 152.

¹⁵⁹ Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), “Introduction,” sec. 3, para. 15, Kindle.

¹⁶⁰ Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 1-18.

¹⁶¹ Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 40.

Moreover, Cherry argues, “There must be some developed and intentional response to the Word at each service in which the word has been proclaimed.”¹⁶² She views the Lord’s Table, in any service where it is offered, as a primary response to the Word as it is preached. When it is not, Cherry advocates for an alternative response to the Word in order to “communicate our response to God as a result of having heard and received God’s Word in worship.” She traces four levels of response to Peter’s sermon in Acts 2. (1) There is an emotional response, as those who heard “were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (v. 37). (2) There is a spiritual response, as Peter calls for repentance (v. 38). (3) There is a symbolic response, the use of actions, gestures, and imagery to portray the spiritual response. In Acts 2, this response takes the form of baptism (v. 41). (4) There is an action response to worship, that is, “putting spiritual change into action on behalf of others.”¹⁶³ Acts 2:44-45 reads, “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

Conclusion: What the Review Reveals

There is scholarly consensus regarding key themes that emerge in biblical worship. Worship is a response to and saturated by God’s revelation, centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ; a life orientation involving cognition, affections, and volition; and engaged most fully in community. A study of the terms for disciples and the equivocation of terms like “believers,” or “brothers and sisters,” yields strong consensus and convergence with a biblical definition of worship. To be a disciple is to be redeemed, to be oriented towards God’s revelation in Christ and in the Scriptures; involves a change

¹⁶² Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 98.

¹⁶³ Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 99-101.

in mind, heart, and will; and is a reality to be pursued and experienced in community. These two concepts (i.e., worship and discipleship) are not identical, but they possess significant overlap in God's program for his people.

A natural inference would be that a pastor or worship planner who is planning and leading with a concern for these central principles of biblical worship would be contributing to the growth of Christian disciples. Many resources exist to equip leaders and planners to think biblically and pastorally and with a view towards central principles of worship when planning services. However, there seems to be a gap in the literature in terms of explicitly drawing these lines between worship and discipleship in practical terms for planners and congregation members. Given the above themes and evident convergence, corporate worship can and does contribute to the Christian's growth in discipleship. The research to follow identified exemplar churches who plan and operate from a robust theology of biblical worship and a pastoral concern for their people in order to identify key practices and principles that then form the basis of a matrix and rubric for use by other worship leaders and congregations.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Corporate gathering and spiritual growth are inextricably linked. This connection is biblically evident and would be affirmed by most in church leadership, but it is neither the heightened expectation of churchgoers nor the purposed intention of many worship planners. Chapter 1 introduced the research problem, namely, that corporate worship engaged improperly or carelessly will lead to a dearth of discipleship. The church will cease to accomplish her mission if she does not worship biblically. The converse is also true: where churches are worshiping, God's people are growing. There are leaders who are operating from a robust theology of worship and pastoral desire. We can learn from their practices in order to be more intentional in preparing God's people to engage corporate worship faithfully.

The previous chapter reviewed the literature in four main categories. The first category was biblical theology of worship literature, and the review yielded a functional definition of worship as a life orientation in response to God's revelation pursued by redeemed people in community. The second category was literature regarding a theology of Christian discipleship: a disciple of Christ pursues a new life orientation to the life and teachings of Jesus as a redeemed person in community with other disciples. The third category, liturgical history, confirmed the ecclesiological desire that the weekly gathering for worship be an opportunity for God's people to better understand and live out the gospel. And concerning the fourth category, contemporary scholars are wrestling with the implications of these historical precedents for the contemporary church. However, there is a gap in literature in terms of explicitly drawing these lines between worship and discipleship in practical terms for planners and for congregation members.

The present study is an attempt to address this gap in the literature in regard to the convergence of worship and discipleship. This chapter describes the methodology of the study, including an overview of the research design, description of the sample, delimitations of the research, limitations of generalization, instrumentation, and procedures used to conduct this study.

Research Purpose

The intent of this qualitative study was to ascertain practical aspects of worship design that positively impact and inform the disciple-making process. It is certainly difficult to quantify spiritual growth. However, being able to better assess how corporate worship practice “grows” individual believers or to systematize the church’s own goals for our fellow worshipers in terms of their discipleship is beneficial for church leadership as they plan and evaluate their discipleship training and worship practices. Doing so will help church members as they adjust their expectations for what should happen in corporate worship and, consequently, in church members themselves.

My hypothesis was that few churches adequately relate corporate worship practice to discipleship process. Most would affirm the spiritual benefit and even centrality of corporate worship in the life of believers, but far too few intentionally plan worship services with the primary intention and expectation that believers will grow as a result. That is, the criteria for selection and execution of worship elements are not expressly related to the discipleship of believers. However, for those who do see and perhaps in some cases intentionally plan for the relationship between corporate worship and discipleship, what are those essential elements of corporate worship practice that positively impact and inform the disciple-making process? What is the necessary accompanying background or preparatory mindset that creates and fosters an expectation of spiritual growth through corporate worship? And how do leaders prepare their congregations to participate in corporate worship as an activity of discipleship? In

answering these questions, my ultimate aim was to create a matrix and rubric for helping pastors and worship planners to structure corporate gatherings and to prepare their congregations to approach and engage worship services as steps on their discipleship pathway.

Research Question Synopsis

There is a gap in the existing literature concerning tools for practical and intentional expression of pastoral worship ministry planning. This study sought to fill that gap by enlisting the aid of exemplar church leaders who operate from an understanding that corporate worship practice is to be integrated with Christian discipleship. The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does the church intentionally incorporate worship practice as a part of the disciple-making process?
2. To what extent do corporate worship practices or specific elements lead to and impact spiritual growth?
3. How do leaders prepare their congregations to perceive and engage corporate worship as part of the discipleship pathway?

Methodological Design Overview

This qualitative study began with recommendation requests from key worship scholars and practitioners (see appendix 1). These scholars or practitioners (“experts”) had published books or journal articles, taught on the subject, or were well-known or respected worship leaders. Specifically, each expert had written works that deal with two or more of the four major categories in the precedent literature study: worship theology, Christian discipleship, liturgical history, and pastoral worship planning. Each expert was introduced to the key tenets of worship as uncovered in this study: revelation, redemption, life orientation, and community. Using these tenets as a guiding framework, experts recommended exemplar churches. For the purposes of this study, churches defined as “exemplar” exhibited the four guiding tenets in the practices of their worship

planners, leaders, and/or pastors. They operate from a robust theology of worship and approach the corporate worship gathering as an essential step on the discipleship pathway of their people. Each recommender was asked to identify between one and three exemplar churches that, in their view, fit the above description.

Following the recommendations of the worship experts, the exemplar churches were contacted with a request for a visit (on-site or virtual) and interviews (in-person or video conference) of the worship leader, pastor, and/or planner (see appendix 2).

There were two data gathering components. First, the worship leader, pastor, and/or planner was interviewed as to their planning process and priorities as well as any methods of congregational preparation. Second, I attended a worship service. When in-person services were not a possibility, I attended virtually. Some preparatory questions were asked of each worship leader or planner in advance of the on-site visit (see appendix 3).

Interview questions for worship leaders and planners during the on-site interview focused on their planning process. Categories included where the leaders begin in the planning process, what the leaders consider to be indispensable elements of the worship service, the criteria for selecting songs and other elements, how the leaders purposefully incorporate Scripture and the morning's sermon text and themes of the service, the preparation of church members for corporate worship by church leaders, and the nature and level of follow-up from Sunday gatherings.

Research Sample and Sampling Technique

The sampling technique employed will be purposive, that is, a “nonprobability sample strategy in which the researcher carefully and mindfully chooses people to interview.”¹ The sample meets the definition of a purposive snowball sample, since the

¹ Brenda D. Phillips, “Qualitative Disaster Research,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Patricia Leavy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 540.

research will begin with a small population of known individuals who will determine the sample by their recommendations of which churches should be included in the study.

Delimitations

Worship scholars and practitioners selected exemplar churches based on criteria I submitted to them regarding a guiding framework of biblical theology. These worship experts spanned multiple liturgical traditions. Each exemplar church leader was able to subscribe to Thomas Kidd's definition of an evangelical: "Evangelicals are born-again Protestants who cherish the Bible as the Word of God and who emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit."² The above definition was included in the communication to both experts and church participants (see appendix 1 and 2).

Limitations of Generalization

As is the case with purposive sampling, the list of thinkers and practitioners who were surveyed for their recommendations was necessarily limited to those whose work or writings were already known to me. Likewise, the exemplar church recommendations were limited to those known by these key thinkers and practitioners. John Creswell and Cheryl Poth recommend that between twenty and sixty interviews should be conducted in order to fully develop, or saturate, the model.³ The sum total of expert recommendations and worship leaders interviewed fit within this range, but this study did leave out a very wide swath of churches for consideration (e.g., those that do not employ a worship planner or leader). There would be great opportunity for denominations, or churches with similar liturgical traditions, to engage a related study

² Thomas Kidd, *Who Is an Evangelical?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 4.

³ John Creswell and Cheryl Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 87.

and achieve more pointed results. However, this research recognized the varied contributions of a broader range of traditions and found many commonalities between them using the categories of biblical theology.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured recorded interviews were the primary data collection instrument.⁴ The interview questions included demographic information requests and open-ended questions (see appendix 4). The first section was comprised of six demographic questions. The second section asked twelve questions related to worship planning and leadership. Each open-ended question correlated to one of the four tenets of biblical theology outlined above and to one or more of the research questions.

The timeline for each interview included seven points of contact between the participant and myself:

1. Initial email alerting the participant to the initial phone call
2. Phone call to set up the interview
3. Email containing the list of questions and instructions for the video interview along with confirmation of the interview time
4. Video interview
5. Thank you email with instructions for transcript verification
6. Email containing the interview transcript
7. Email containing the preliminary conclusions with instructions for verification

Each interview was conducted according to the following protocols:⁵

1. The interview was facilitated using video-conferencing software (Zoom Video Communications) that allows for recording the entire interview.

⁴ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 160.

⁵ Adapted from Stacy A. Jacob and S. Paige Furgerson, "Writing Interview Protocols and Conducting Interviews: Tips for Students New to the Field of Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Report* 17, no. 42 (2012): 7-10.

2. The participant was sent the informed consent statement and asked to sign and return.
3. The interview was conducted.
4. I thanked the participant and previewed the remaining points of contact.
5. The participant was informed of the transcript validation process.
6. The participant was informed of the preliminary interpretation validation process.

Following the interview, the data was processed according to the following protocols:

1. Each interview was transcribed.
2. Each interview was coded using emerging codes and themes from the precedent literature.
3. The qualitative data was analyzed into themes.⁶ Themes centered around the content and ideas contained in the research questions.

Concerning worship service attendance, I prepared according to each church leader's response to question 7: "What does your congregation know about the worship service before the worship service?" During and after the worship service, I described my experience of the event and then analyzed the content.

I implemented the six steps for interpretational analysis outlined by Gall, Gall, and Borg: (1) organizing all the transcribed data into NVivo database, (2) breaking the text into meaning segments, (3) creating coding categories, (4) applying the coding categories to the entire database, (5) organizing the results by coded categories, and (6) discerning the themes that emerge based on codes and a systematic conceptualization of recurring codes in the database.⁷

The combining of data from interviews and worship service analyses is displayed in two ways: (1) a matrix that will be constructed to show how worship service

⁶ Creswell and Poth recommend narrowing an original listing of 25-30 codes into 5-6 themes for analysis. Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 347-48.

⁷ Joyce P. Gall, M. D. Gall, and Walter R. Borg, *Applying Educational Research: A Practical Guide*, 5th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2005), 315.

elements are connected to one another and serve larger goals and (2) a rubric that outlines some key principles to consider and guiding questions to ask when planning a worship service with these goals in mind.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This qualitative study explored the planning processes and worship services of fourteen worship leaders, planners, and pastors, all of whom craft corporate gatherings for the local church. The study emphasized findings by reporting participant responses to semi-structured interview questions, using cross-case analysis to correlate the emerging themes with key tenets of the precedent literature. This chapter explains how I assembled and evaluated data, and then it presents the findings from my analysis of the fourteen worship leaders and the worship services that they led or planned.

Compilation Protocol

This study unfolded in a pre-study stage and then two concurrent stages of data collection, data analysis, and data reporting. The study began with the identification of six worship scholars or practitioners in the area of worship. Designated as “worship experts,” these individuals have published books or journal articles on worship, have taught on the subject of worship, or are themselves well-known or respected worship leaders. Specifically, each expert has written works that deal with two or more of the four major categories in the precedent literature study: worship theology, Christian discipleship, liturgical history, and pastoral worship planning. I chose these experts to intentionally reflect a broader swath of the evangelical church: traditions represented included Wesleyan, Reformed, Southern Baptist, and Presbyterian strands of evangelicalism.

After the literature review, which proved helpful in identifying experts, I sent a preliminary email to each expert requesting their involvement (appendix 3). All of the

experts agreed to participate in the study pending the development and approval of the appropriate protocols and instruments. Having identified the experts who would be recommending church leaders, I developed interview protocols for the leaders. The semi-structured interview questions involved three distinct sections. The first section involved demographic questions related to specifics about the leader and his/her church and view of his/her role in the church. The second section was made up of four broad questions that uncovered the leader's working definition of worship and discipleship as well as the goals that the leader had for his/her congregation related to the worship service. Because of the broad nature of these questions, I determined to provide the questions in advance of the interview in case more time to prepare was needed or desired. The third section of interview questions related specifically to the planning of corporate worship gatherings. At least one question in this section related to each one of the key tenets of biblical worship as outlined in chapter 2. Prior to my submitting the protocols to the seminary ethics committee, my committee chair and supervisor—Anthony Foster—provided feedback and gave his approval, as required. I then submitted all contact forms and study instruments to Foster, the other thesis reader, and the seminary ethics committee for approval.

Once the study was approved, I formally contacted the six experts by email (appendix 3). The correspondence included a brief introduction of the research project, an invitation for the expert to affirm the direction of the project or speak into any perceived deficiencies, and a request for him/her to provide recommendations of one-to-three exemplar church leaders. For the purposes of this study, churches defined as “exemplar” exhibit the four guiding tenets in the practices of their worship planners, leaders, and/or pastors. They operate from a robust theology of worship and approach the corporate worship gathering as an essential step on the discipleship pathway of their people. Each expert was asked to identify between one and three exemplar churches that, in his/her view, fit the above description. Both the experts and the exemplar church leaders to be

included in the study were further delimited according to the definitions found in chapter 3.

I met with four of the six experts using the Zoom platform, recording all of the interviews through both video and voice calls. The other two experts shared their affirmation of and interactions with the study via email as well as provided worship leader recommendations. Each of the six experts identified at least one exemplar for the study. Although I asked for only one-to-three recommendations (appendix 1), the experts provided a total of twenty-six names for consideration. Two of the experts gave many more names than required but prioritized their lists. In each of these instances, I contacted only his/her first recommendations in order to ensure that the study was not overly weighted towards one expert's recommendations. In addition, both of the names provided by one expert did not meet the criteria for selection and so proved to be unsuitable for the study. Because of this, my initial list of exemplars totaled sixteen and came from five of the six experts.

By email, I contacted these sixteen worship leaders who had been recommended by the experts. The correspondence included a brief summary of the research along with an abstract, an invitation to participate in a one-hour interview, and my observance of a worship service at their church (appendix 2). Out of those contacted, fourteen agreed to participate in the study. Once they agreed, I sent a follow-up email with the four broader questions for their preparation should they desire the additional time (appendix 3).

The first data-gathering component was my observation of worship services planned or led by the exemplar church leaders. Whenever possible, my worship service observation took place before the scheduled interview, though in two cases, the order was reversed. I attended one service live because the church did not have a livestream or video recording; I attended all other services virtually. One of the churches, which was not yet meeting in-person due to the COVID-19 pandemic, did not have a conventional

livestreamed service. Instead, its Sunday worship gathering was a Zoom video conference, in which I participated.

Besides coding specific service elements and songs, I noted elements and instruction given that corresponded to the key tenets of worship and discipleship as laid out in the literature review. Categories for coding included the following: “response to revelation” (i.e., any time that the congregation was prompted to engage a service element as God’s Word or to respond to God’s Word); “Christ’s work” (i.e., any time that the person and work of Jesus was explicitly stated or demonstrated as central to the gathering); “community consciousness” (i.e., any time when the community was engaged with one another; had to interact with one another; or had to participate in speaking, singing, praying, or otherwise taking action in the service); and “call to discipleship” (i.e., any time when instruction or service elements pointed the people outside the assembly, either to consider the truth or to live out its implications in their own lives). Though I considered the worship elements themselves, I was equally concerned with how intentional each leader was in prompting the congregation. Songs were considered not only for their content and their placement in a service but also for how leaders intentionally prepared their people to receive the content.

As interviews and observations progressed, coding categories emerged that I denoted as “Planning Considerations.” There were three major considerations I observed to be prominent as factors in planning. The first was “the gospel,” where the gospel was an explicit organizing principle. The second was the “sermon text,” where the main text of the sermon helped to shape the content of the remainder of the worship service. The third was “church life,” which referred to those instances that were unique to the life of a particular congregation and that impacted the content and order of the service. In addition to the major considerations, I also coded instances entitled “the liturgical calendar” where the church year was obviously referenced in the service or mentioned as a planning consideration in an interview.

I conducted interviews in spring 2021 with each of the exemplar church leaders. Eleven of the fourteen interviews were conducted and recorded through both video and voice calls using the Zoom platform; the other three were conducted in-person and recorded. I implemented the six steps for interpretational analysis outlined by Joyce Gall, M. D. Gall, and Walter Borg: (1) organizing all the transcribed data into NVivo database, (2) breaking the text into meaning segments, (3) creating coding categories, (4) applying the coding categories to the entire database, (5) organizing the results by coded categories, and (6) discerning the themes that emerge based on codes and a systematic conceptualization of recurring codes in the database.¹

Demographic and Sample Data

I enlisted experts in the study and practice of biblical worship, each of whom had published works in the field and was also principally involved in the teaching and training of worship leaders. I also intentionally sought to reach across denominational lines. Each expert identified him/herself as an evangelical according to Thomas Kidd’s definition: “Evangelicals are born-again Protestants who cherish the Bible as the Word of God and who emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.”² This study focused on churches in the United States.

Table 1. Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Church	Denom	Mem	Gen	Age	YrsMi	YrsCh	Title
Tom	1	Baptist	400	M	52	30	25	Pastor
Steve	2	RefBa	100	M	41	25	8	Elder
Jack	3	NonDen	150	M	36	15	12	Pastor

¹ Joyce P. Gall, M. D. Gall, and Walter R. Borg, *Applying Educational Research: A Practical Guide*, 5th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2005), 315.

² Thomas Kidd, *Who Is an Evangelical?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 4.

Table 1 continued

Pseudonym	Church	Denom	Mem	Gen	Age	YrsMi	YrsCh	Title
Karl	4	NonDen	1200	M	42	21	3	Pastor
Ben	5	SBC	600	M	30	7	7	Pastor
Brent	6	Ang	3000	M	32	14	5	Pastor
Dave	7	Wes	1500	M	31	9	9	Director
Larry	8	NonDen	100	M	34	8	8	Pastor
Mark	9	SBC	200	M	26	4	9	Pastor
Michael	10	NonDen	250	M	34	8	8	MinMus
Amanda	11	CRC	500	F	41	8	34	Wor Co
James	12	CRC	750	M	30	7	7	Pastor
Ken	13	PCA	4500	M	25	2	2	WL
Darren	14	SGC	150	M	36	18	6	Pastor

Note: Denom = denominational affiliation; Mem = membership; YrsMi = Years in Ministry; YrsCh = Years in current church; Min Mus = Minister of Music; Wor Co = Worship Coordinator; WL = Worship Leader; RefBA = Reformed Baptist; NonDen = Non-Denominational; SBC = Southern Baptist Convention; Ang = Anglican; Wes = Wesleyan; CRC = Christian Reformed Church; PCA = Presbyterian Church in America; SGC = Sovereign Grace Churches

Churches involved in the study represented eight different denominations: Non-Denominational, Wesleyan, Presbyterian, Reformed Baptist, Sovereign Grace, Southern Baptist, Anglican, and Christian Reformed Church. I characterized five of the churches, which follow a more explicitly defined historical worship order, as having a “rooted” liturgy, and I characterized the other nine as having a “free” liturgy.

The median age of the worship leaders represented was 34. The worship leaders had a combined 176 years of ministry experience, with an average of 12.5 years. Churches ranged in size from (approx.) 100 to 4500 members. The oldest church was established in 1872, and the youngest in 2012.

Table 2. Church details

Church	Denom	Mem	Liturgy	Age	ML	SL	No Part
1	Baptist	400	F	60	65	33	13
2	SBC	100	R	15	90	48	8
3	NonDen	150	F	12	84	46	5
4	Evan	1200	F	86	72	38	12
5	SBC	600	F	58	67	45	14
6	Ang	3000	R	150	52	14	12
7	Wes	1500	F/R	125	62	34	15
8	NonDen	100	F	5	118	62	7
9	RefBa	200	F	9	90	55	7
10	NonDen	250	F	50	59	29	10
11	CRC	500	R	48	75	23	15
12	CRC	750	R	140	55	25	8
13	PCA	4500	F	44	79	37	16
14	SGC	150	F	7	65	35	5

Note: Denom = denominational affiliation; RefBA = Reformed Baptist; NonDen = Non-Denominational; Evan = Evangelical; SBC = Southern Baptist Convention; Ang = Anglican; Wes = Wesleyan; CRC = Christian Reformed Church; PCA = Presbyterian Church in America; SGC = Sovereign Grace Churches; Mem = Membership; F = Free Liturgy; R = Rooted Liturgy; ML = Meeting Length; SL = Sermon length; No Part = Number of Participants

Findings

I now present the findings from my analysis of the fourteen worship leaders and the worship services that they led or planned.

Role

Nine of the respondents have the official title of pastor. Two specifically referenced themselves as an elder at the church. Every one of them identified what they are doing as pastoral, whether it was recognized as such. Karl said it plainly:

My title is pastor of worship. And so that is the bread and butter of what I do. It entails planning and leading services as a way of pastoring the entire congregation. If you know the concept of air war and ground war: in air war you shoot things and

in ground war you're on the ground doing things and so in air war you know you can do a lot of good in a large context. You can't be specific, like you can with counseling, but you can really care for a lot of people.

Jack expressed his desire as a pastor and elder:

I want them to be able to articulate the gospel. I want to see them model Christ in acts of service. So that's what we try to push. Obviously this was the Pauline example of being Christ-like and how to be a shepherd. And my wife is shepherding three little girls right now while I'm at work. I want her to be an exemplar of these things. And I want all the men and women of our church to aspire to this.

Darren likewise stressed the pastoral, people-first nature of his ministry in the church: "I'm in the trenches with these people so it's not just a Sunday morning 'turn it on and then I'm done and I'm here to perform for everyone.' No, I'm going through the highs and lows of life with people and walking alongside them. And so with congregational worship it's very much a part of what I'm called to as a pastor."

As pastors, these individuals emphasized the equipping of their ministries as central to what they do. Ben directly connected his ministry in worship with the pastoral calling expressed by Paul in Ephesians 4: "I truly believe we're not doing what God's told us to do if we're not discipling those around us. Because if we really see the context of Ephesians 4:12, God gave the apostles, the teachers, the evangelists, all of these as gifts to the church, that they would train others to do the work of ministry."

In some cases, the ministry of worship takes a particularly pastoral direction in that worship venues or styles are merged together. Karl's church had two different musical worship expressions, so his hiring was for the purpose of unifying these two expressions into one worshipping congregation; his musical versatility and pastoral acumen are now being called upon to facilitate the greater unity of the church.

James serves in an over-150-year-old church that found itself, in his words, dying. Rather than close the doors, the church engaged a re-establishment in 2012.

According to James,

It was maybe not formally, but sociologically, a lot like a church plant. There were hundreds of new people who had no prior connection to the church. There was a shift in the way the liturgy of the service was presented and then obviously, music

was a big part of that. So for a long time, our church was a more traditional worship expression with pretty much only organ hymns. And so kind of a move to adding and incorporating more of a worship ensemble as a part of the musical expression of worship.

Other respondents do not have the title of “pastor.” Yet in their description of their role and the planning process, each of them is doing work that could, in part, be characterized as “pastoral.” Each is equipping God’s people for the work of ministry by helping them to respond to God’s Word to the accomplishment of his purpose in and through their lives (Eph 4:11-16). Dave inherited a church worship ministry that had five different venues on a Sunday morning. In his words, “It felt like the venues were actually creating convictions instead of preferences.” Dave continued, “I think, if your idea of worship is that eventually we’re all going to be in the same room, then we should probably get used to it now, and deal with some of the things that are keeping us from that.” The church did merge the multiple venues, which created additional challenges and the opportunity to exercise pastoral gifts. According to Dave,

We decided that we couldn’t just choose one style. Instead we had to create our own. We weren’t really sure we could pull off the blended idea of, like, let’s do a hymn with an organ. Now let’s switch to a praise band. Instead, we thought, we’ve got to do something entirely different. So basically, we’ve created a culture where we have asked what skills are in our congregation and how can we use those skills to have the conversation of worship.

All of the skill sets reflected in the many venues of the church were merged into one, and Dave’s role through writing and arranging music is to free congregation members to use their gifts in a multifaceted body. Though his title is director of worship and music, Dave’s musical gifts are being employed to pastor the church.

Amanda is one of only two of the exemplar worship leaders who has been in her church longer than she has been in vocational church ministry. As a violinist who also plays cello and piano and sings, Amanda participated in worship services from a very young age and characterized those experiences as formational for her. She describes what she appreciates about her title, which is worship coordinator:

I'm not the leader, the music leader, because we have a plethora of talented musicians and theologians and philosophers. It's incredible the resources that we have within our congregation. So I don't take on the role then of saying, "this is what we're going to do and I'm leading all of you people." It's asking, "will you help create a liturgy here? Will you help lead the choir here? Will you play the piano here, will you sing for this?"

Besides her invitational role and equipping people to serve together in the liturgy, Amanda has a training and teaching role. In her words,

We try to have some training for those roles. What does it mean to be in this role, not just logistics. What is your role as the intercessory prayer leader? You are acting on behalf of the congregation, bringing the requests of the congregation, not just of the congregation, but of the world. And so you're acting as a priest, bringing those together and speaking on behalf of the people. So my job is coordinating all of the experts as well as inviting people of all ages and cultures and abilities to find a place in worship and then and leading the congregation.

In the case of Amanda's church, she is serving an administrative role, but with a view to equipping and training that supports and strengthens the work of pastors in her church.

Shared ministry, shared leadership. In my interviews, the leaders who are more pastorally and theologically trained tended to view themselves in more of a guardian or caretaker role in terms of the church's understanding and practice of biblical worship. Others who are not theologically trained or less experienced embrace a shared leadership style in order to ensure biblical faithfulness. Amanda sees her role as coordinating and synthesizing the gifts of theologians, artists, and liturgists within her congregation. Ken, whose title is "worship leader," is the youngest and least experienced of the exemplars and serves at the largest church. He leans heavily into the church's established worship vision and theology and continues to learn in the context of other seasoned leaders. He spoke at length about his church's vision for worship, which is itself tied intimately to disciple-making: "Equipping God's people to use God's gifts for God's glory."

Each leader valued the input of his/her senior pastor as well as the multiplication of worship leadership who shared and could forward the vision for worship in their congregations. Ben talked about the increase in participation by other members in

every part of the worship service: “It was just (the senior pastor) and I, the two of us leading worship service after worship service after worship service. And I thought it was important to get our other staff involved. And so that gives them some spiritual leadership in front of our church. And so that’s been good for us.” Larry said, “In my role as a worship pastor, I’m also a deacon. I’m just helping (our people) sing to their savior.” As Jack talked about his partnership with the teaching pastors of the church, he said, “So I work closely with the pastors, the preaching pastors, and let them know in those cases, ‘hey, I have songs about the faith, the covenant, faithfulness of God, and I need you to lean on that in your sermon so that when we sing it, it’s obvious to people.’”

Mark talked about how he goes through the sermon every week with the senior pastor prior to Sunday:

We’ll go through it. And then as he’s doing that, I have our songs in front of us and our set list history of what we’ve done before in the previous weeks and themes and different doctrines or whatever he’s talking about are kind of running through my head. And so certain songs, I’ll say, “well, what do you think about this song?” So it’s a very give and take conversation between us.

Each of the leaders viewed their role as a partnership with the senior pastor, elders, and other leaders in the church. Tom has been motivated to shape the worship service to fit the contours of the gospel and has engaged the conversation with the elders. Because of his long tenure of pastoral leadership at the church, they have allowed him to lead this change, and Tom has in turn engaged the elders in order to participate.

In the worship service at Tom’s church (appendix 5), three different elders were involved, each offering a scripted personal prayer that fit both the contours of the gospel and the sermon text for that morning as well as being pastoral in nature for that congregation. When I asked Tom about this, he commented,

I was able to encourage my elders this past Sunday, because for the past eight or nine months they have been modeling that prayer of repentance, and modeling that intercessory prayer for people in some powerful ways. Even in our benedictions, instead of just reading Scripture they’ll often come and say, “This is why we do this . . . this is what God is calling us to do, so even as we speak these words of the Lord, consider how he wants you to respond to them.”

Tom is leading the elders, and they are sharing that responsibility to help create a culture of corporate worship.

Summary of role. Every leader interviewed had some level of musical ability and engagement with music. Some are particularly accomplished musicians, performing, writing, and arranging music. Not one exemplar identified primarily as a church musician, a song leader, or music minister. Even those who do not hold the title of “pastor” see the role of planning and leading corporate worship gatherings as pastoral in nature. That is, those leaders saw their role as enabling their churches to respond to God’s revelation while equipping church members to use their gifts for God’s glory and the flourishing of the body—and all of that in partnership with other church leaders.

Preparatory Questions

I gave four questions to each exemplar ahead of time so that they could prepare in advance if they desired (appendix 3). The answers they gave expose a well-constructed framework from which they are performing their ministry functions and serving the church.

Definition of worship. Every definition given for worship included the idea of worship as a response. Ken defined worship as “God’s people responding to who he is. It’s responding to the initiation of God.” Amanda was one of many who tied the idea of corporate worship to discipleship:

And I think we are very much formed in corporate worship, but we also can acknowledge him and worship him individually. And, you know, while we’re working, while we’re, you know, cooking a meal for our family or whatever, but I think we are most formed to be able to worship him in our everyday life by the corporate worship that we have on Sundays. That’s at least the ideal.

Ben explained how his definition informs his service planning:

When we see God for who he is, we respond in a way, just as we see in Isaiah six. It leads us to see ourselves for who we are. So we see God. God is revealed through his word and in the corporate worship setting, it is our job as worship pastors to put

the word before our people, because what better way for them to respond to God than putting the word in front of them?

Although the question was intentionally broad, the leaders emphasized the corporate nature of worship. Dave defined worship as a “Christo-centric dialogue between God the Father and his people in which we are edified and empowered.” Mark’s definition was “loving the Lord, your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and loving your neighbor as yourself by the power of the Holy Spirit lived out privately and corporately within the gathered saints once a week and guided by the authoritative, inspired word.”

Darren explained corporate worship as Word and witness—and thoroughly Christocentric:

And so the effect is that we then come only in Christ, only through Christ, to receive from God through Christ. And so because we’ve been united to Christ, so all of our activity by the Spirit is taking place in Christ, from the preaching, prayer and singing to the sacraments. And then we’re also longing for Christ. And so as we bear witness to the worth and work of God, there is this intrinsic eschatological expectation for the Lord’s kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as in heaven.

Within the discussion of definition, many were prompted to talk about the role of the Sunday morning gathering or to differentiate between worship in general and corporate gathered worship in particular. Karl emphasized the dual or complimentary purposes of worship and edification:

On Sunday mornings, our goal is to worship God, and edify one another as God works through His Word, Spirit and people. When you say “worship God” everybody thinks vertically. But we also edify one another, because in Scripture the statements about congregational gatherings, are not described as worship. In the New Testament, it’s the language of edification. So it’s meant to build one another up. And so we worship God and edify one another as God works.

James discussed the importance of the Trinity as a rubric for all of his theological understanding and of the metanarrative of Scripture as a guiding framework for his understanding of worship. For him, the pattern of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation is both the bedrock of our lives and illustrative of the “holy conversation”

of worship wherein we hear and respond to God's gracious initiation and enablement.

This led James to weave the intersection of corporate worship and discipleship into his initial definition of worship:

We modify a statement by Lesslie Newbigin, "you are about to enter every sector of public life to claim it for Christ." That's the sending energy that we find in worship. We also talk about how you can't send what hasn't been gathered and you can't gather what hasn't been sent. So that's an ever flowing sort of momentum of gathering and sending that we get to participate in by the grace of God until that day when Christ comes again to make all things new.

Definition of discipleship. The definitions given for discipleship varied to a greater degree than those for worship. Mark said, "I would define discipleship as just generally teaching others to follow Jesus and obey his commandments." Jack began broadly: "I like to start with the Great Commission. Christ kind of defines [discipleship] for us in teaching the nations to obey all that I've commanded you." Many of the leaders made explicit reference to the tenets of Christian discipleship outlined in the literature review, and many made a connection between biblical worship and Christian discipleship. Ben referred to discipleship as a response: "Discipleship is a response, discipleship is the way that we worship, because if we are truly living our lives as we should, we respond to the Lord by helping others grow in their relationship." Dave painted a picture of a cyclical relationship between worship and discipleship: "I think that discipleship is primarily a horizontal conversation between Spirit-filled people. To encourage, teach and train one another, to better posture ourselves, to hear from God and to participate with him in his kingdom, come and work." Michael also drew the connection between worship and discipleship: "Discipleship is accomplished through many means, including the graces that we receive in corporate worship, but not limited to that." Michael talked about the importance of parents' modeling a life of vibrant corporate worship as a means of discipling their children: "From a discipleship standpoint, as parents being primary disciple makers in the home, it absolutely grieves me to see particularly fathers not obeying the word to sing."

A constant theme in the answers given was the corporate and relational nature of discipleship. In Amanda's words, "Discipleship is learning, not just as a mental activity, but also learning in relationship." James talked about discipleship as a "deep relationship with Scripture and a pursuit of the heart of God through prayer in relationship with community, together." Tom related his definition of discipleship directly to corporate worship: in the worship gathering, "we're making Christ followers, we are teaching, equipping, training people to both follow Christ with all they are and in the process of that, replicate that in others." Darren lamented the divorce of modern discipleship from its corporate dimension. He said that throughout church history, "people were shaped through the corporate gathering of God's people and in the living out of the truth heard then." In the course of answering this question, Darren asked a question that has fueled my research: "What if we structured [church ministry] in such a way that it's supporting what we do Sunday, and prepares our kids to engage with God and engage with God's people on Sunday morning?"

Results in lives, marks of maturity. The next two broad preparatory questions helped to show how each worship leader understands the connection between corporate worship and discipleship and helped to reveal the depth of pastoral concern each leader has for his/her congregations. Jack said of his congregation, "I want to see them become adorers of God: edified, equipped, and sent out, prepared for God's mission in the world." Michael echoed the phrase "edified and equipped." Ben desires ". . . that they get a clear view of the gospel and they are able to respond appropriately to that gospel." Steve used the term "disciple-worshippers" in articulating a mission for the intersection of worship and discipleship:

My goal is to be part of their progressive growth in as disciple worshippers. So if an unbeliever comes to the service, my hope is that they are confronted with the gospel and are led to a further understanding of the gospel. For believers who are attending my service, it's essentially the same. I want them to be confronted with the gospel, informed by the gospel. I'm contributing in the service toward their spiritual maturity, their relationship with God through Christ, their communion with God and

then the other six days of the week living out a life of worship in obedience to what God has commanded.

Dave's desire is that his congregation would leave with a greater recognition for the "grand narrative of God" and would hear God's invitation to participate in that grand narrative. Amanda wants her church to "see God's presence, to have a sense of the mystery of God. His otherness; be able to learn to be more like God in loving justice, seeking peace, seeking peace, living out the fruits of the Spirit and in their lives, wherever they may be."

Many of the respondents modified the question to reflect a longer view of their goals. Karl said, "I think more in terms of how will people be progressively formed over 200 worship services." Amanda said, "I want that person to come back." Brent wants the people to be

so formed and shaped by the gospel that is proclaimed to them through various means of words, sacrament, prayer, singing that their lives continue in that kind of Second Corinthians three model of being transformed into his likeness as we gaze on his glory. Yeah, so, I mean, if I'm putting flesh on that, it's that people more wholeheartedly give their lives over to following Jesus and lay down their idols, repent of that and over the course of time are shaped into mature Christ following Christians and prepared for death and eternity.

Answers to these two broad questions revealed a depth of pastoral consideration by each respondent. The length of time in ministry had a direct bearing on the number of instances where responses indicated an understanding of the connection between worship and discipleship. The longer one was in ministry, the greater of an emphasis one placed on larger goals that were not specific to one particular service.

Summary of preparatory questions. There was great harmony in responses by worship leaders—that worship is to be saturated with the Scriptures, to be centered on the person and work of Christ, to draw people into greater community, and to lead to greater response within the assembly. Though there was not the same degree of unanimity or depth in regard to a definition of discipleship, clear connections were made

between worship and discipleship and between the work of planning and leading corporate gatherings and the spiritual growth of the people in the congregation.

Planning Considerations

The next set of questions all related to how the leader planned the corporate worship gathering. Both the interviews and worship service observations provided answers to these questions.

Sermon text. The sermon text features prominently for a few of the planners. Of all of the exemplars, Ben's approach to planning and leading was the most dependent on the sermon Scripture text and theme (appendix 9). An opening scriptural call to worship was a direct tie to the text of the day and was stated as such. The opening song referenced the Scripture and recalled the text. The following welcome by an elder functioned much like a "teaser" for the upcoming sermon, and the ensuing pastoral prayer used the concept of "rest" in order to intercede for the needs of the congregation.

Mark's church service was also oriented solely around the sermon text (appendix 13). After an opening welcome and Scripture call to worship by the pastor (Ps 36:7-9) and one song, the sermon was given. All of the remaining songs were after the sermon—in response to it. In our interview, Mark described this as normative for their church. Jack's church, which also employs a freer and less-involved liturgy, explicitly ties songs to sermon text and theme. According to Jack,

We try to have a harmonization or a mutual emphasis with the sermon as best we can, because the way we structure our services, we have a couple of songs up front and then several songs at the end. So there's that chance for worship at the end to then be the corporate proclamation of the truth that was given in the sermon in the text and go, so we're singing to one another and to God the application of the sermon.

Table 3. Incorporation with sermon text

Incorporation	Church Number
Service elements related to the sermon	9
Structure built to the sermon	1, 4, 8
Both related elements and leading structure	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
Neither related elements or leading structure	

Gospel. In the case of many of the churches, the gospel took prominence as the organizing principle, either in the form of the structured liturgy or a purposed planning. The sermon text was woven into the telling, and response songs were chosen to help the congregation respond to the preached Word. Karl advocated strongly for the main notes of the gospel being sounded in every service: “I need to thank God for grace and receive His forgiveness and then go and live for Him; every service needs to contain those elements.” He continued, “These may or may not fit a strict liturgy, but I think if we’re desiring to form fully formed followers of Jesus Christ you have to be thinking in each of these categories.” Karl was referring to a liturgical structure or historical pattern (modeled after Isa 6) that, as Bryan Chappell observes, traces the experience of the gospel in the life of a believer: Adoration, Confession, Expiation, Proclamation, Dedication, and Commission.³ Thus, in the services with a historically rooted liturgy, the gospel as an organizing principle could be seen very clearly. Congregation members were taken on a journey of sorts through the entire progression.

Jack alluded to a second way that the gospel becomes an organizing principle for corporate worship: “The preeminent first thought... needs to be the value of the gospel must be preached. The point is gospel proclamation from creation to glorification. We

³ Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 99. The structure above reflects Scott Aniol’s helpful amendment of the pattern in “How I Order Corporate Worship,” Religious Affections Ministries, July 9, 2014, <https://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-worship/how-i-order-corporate-worship/>.

believe it's both edifying for the believer, and a means of conversion for the non-believer." This articulation of the gospel from creation to consummation can be clearly seen in the service order of Jack's church (appendix 7).

In every one of the churches with a "free" liturgy, the leaders explicitly mentioned the gospel as central to their planning concerns, though there was not always a clear overarching gospel structure in their services. Michael recalled what he often says to his teaching pastor: "If you don't preach the gospel, I'm going to make sure we sing it." Tom said, "I want people to walk away with an engagement with the gospel: the shape, the songs chosen, the Scriptures that are read, the prayers that are read, and even the placement of those things in general is done to communicate the gospel."

Dave talked about the challenge of bringing multiple venues together, and this drove the deeper desire for gospel centrality in worship: "We needed to answer a bigger question than 'what song should we sing?' We felt we should ask, 'what story are we retelling?' And we landed on the story of Christ. And so that has framed for us a kind of goal for every single week."

Liturgy. Those leaders who come from one of the more rooted liturgical traditions had approaches that were much less dependent on the sermon text and leaned heavily into the structure of the liturgy and the church season. Brent, whose Anglican church follows the Book of Common Prayer, talked about the fixed liturgy as a guardian of the gospel:

When you're looking at Christian liturgies across traditions, the common thread is that they're all structured around the story of the gospel or the story of kind of creation, fall, redemption, consummation, how you want to describe it. The story arc of the Scripture is the story arc of a worship service in the Christian tradition and certainly in the Prayer Book tradition.

The approach of Dave's planning team intentionally weaves together a semi-structured liturgy that adheres to the church calendar and gospel proclamation (appendix 11). He explained that at first, the only priority was to tell the story of God, with marginal

attention given to the Christian year. In time, he said, it became more of a priority “to lean into some of these seasons a bit more so that we’re still telling creation, incarnation, recreation every week, but we kind of focus it on one portion of the Christian year, which tells the story of Christ in Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter and Ordinary Time.” The teaching pastor’s series follows general themes from the Christian year. In the example I observed, the service acknowledged the season of Eastertide and, in particular, the Sunday known historically as “Doubting Thomas Sunday.” A worship leader gave instruction on the season and on the Sunday, which led to band members’ sharing Scriptures on peace and security in the midst of doubts. The message that morning, based on Isaiah 32:1-4 and Luke 24:28-35, focused on the real presence of the resurrected Christ. It was a fitting text for the season and meshed well with other service elements.

Table 4. Planners’ incorporation of historical liturgy

Incorporation	Free Liturgy	Rooted Liturgy
Explicit Reference or organizing principle		2, 6, 7, 11, 12
Some reference or consistency	10	
Other historical components	3, 13	
No reference	1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 14	

Body life. The gospel, the ordered liturgy, and the sermon text all figured into the planning process for each worship leader. I also observed church body life as a significant planning concern for every interviewee.

Body-inclusive elements. My contention is that well-functioning corporate worship gatherings make God’s people conscious of one another. As we worship together, we are drawn closer into community with one another. There were two key questions to be asked vis-à-vis community in worship. The first is “What elements of the

service required or prompted congregational participation or involvement?” Dave summarized this sentiment well:

The word liturgy means “the work of the people.” And so in my mind, if you can show up at a service and the people don’t have to be there, then I mean, is this really church? You’re going to be able to rehearse a lot of what you’re going to do on a Sunday morning. But there should be at least one thing that you can’t rehearse because the people aren’t in the room, whatever that is.

In interviews, I asked each worship leader, “What elements of the service help the congregation to become more conscious of one another?” Every worship leader mentioned singing as a primary element. Three of the leaders specifically mentioned leaving the lights on in the auditorium during corporate singing. Dave explained, “We don’t want people to be able to get lost in their emotions or where they’re like we want them to know they are a part of this community gathered in this moment.” Jack said that with the lights up, “there’s no hiding from one another.” He spoke to the selection of songs, that they be what he called “one another” or “horizontal” songs. Mark commented, “During singing there’s been a handful of times when we’re singing where I’ve tried to remind everybody just to be conscious to actually listen to your other brothers and sisters singing. And remember that these are the voices of fellow saints, those who have been purchased by the blood of Christ.” Michael spoke about adjusting the decibel level of the room so that people can hear one another during singing: “We use feedback from the congregation, even if I don’t always agree with it, to help us understand if people feel like they can hear each other.”

Amanda’s church has what they refer to as a “basic English service” for many congregants who are refugees and are new to the English language. Most of these attenders speak Swahili, and some have begun attending the main worship service. Amanda has incorporated some Swahili songs and phrases into the service. She said,

The hope is that we don’t just remember them, but that remembering them helps us remember that we have brothers and sisters in our local church, but also in the broader church, who speak different languages, have different cultures, et cetera. It

is another way of reminding people that we worship together with a very broad range of cultures and people.

Besides singing, seven leaders explicitly mentioned the Lord's Supper as a key community-conscious element for their congregation. Tom explained his experience thus: "Observing communion together truly feels like a together event. I wish the whole church could see from my vantage point on the platform watching the church physically take communion all across the room at the same time—its really amazing to me." The sanctuary of Steve's church has a cruciform shape, so taking the Lord's Supper is truly surrounding the table. He said that in Communion, "we're looking across the table at one another, which is very powerful."

Other service elements mentioned included prayer, the public reading of Scripture, and corporate and responsive readings. Brent talked about the passing of the peace:

There's a moment where you say, "and the peace of Christ, be always with you," and the people respond "and with your spirit." And then you're supposed to actually go around and shake people's hand. And a typical church greeting, you're greeting one another. I think it's liturgically symbolic that it happens right after we're reconciled with God, that we're embodying the reconciliation with one another through passing the peace of Christ. I think that's really significant.

Amanda's church had the most varied elements of any service as well as the most participation by congregation members. Rather than a service livestream, the church service was a video conference through Zoom. The service was a mixture of recorded greetings, readings and songs, the sermon (which the pastor preached from the church sanctuary), and live prayer requests and additional elements. During a particular song, members of the liturgical dance team had recorded their movements to be played during the singing of the song.

For churches with a more fixed liturgy, the leaders recognized the corporate nature of nearly everything that is done in the service. Steve explained, "We stress both verbally and then through action over and over again that this is not just a bunch of individual Christians getting together to have an individual experience with the Lord.

This is corporate.” The elements of the service reinforce this emphasis throughout. For the more-structured liturgies (e.g., Steve’s, Brent’s, James’s, and Amanda’s), participation was pervasive. Three services began with a Christian greeting: “The Lord be with you, and also with you.” There were corporate readings of Scriptures to which the congregation responded, “Thanks be to God.” A corporate confession of sin was read by congregations, out loud, together.

I certainly observed that community participation was built into the services of more structured liturgies. However, Brent expressed what he saw as a shortcoming in this regard:

The prayerbook tradition to a fault is very vertical and less horizontal. And that has created a problem in the Anglican tradition and Episcopalianism. It’s sort of like the same critique that people give of charismatic worship nowadays. It’s like having their own privatized devotional experience and they just happen to be standing next to the people.

This penchant towards an individual experience that could be engaged privately was remedied in some gatherings by intentional teaching or introduction to certain elements of the service.

Body-specific elements. The first question I asked regarding community consciousness involved what elements of the service required or prompted congregational participation—or, in Dave’s words, what elements of the service could not be rehearsed without the congregation. The second question was “What elements were specific to a congregation?” In other words, what elements of the service could not be transplanted to another congregation? Were there personal elements, references to individuals or church-specific concerns that made the community conscious not only that they were part of a larger body but also of their particular local body. What elements could be used to help draw people closer to one another?

Every worship service observed, from the most to the least structured, had elements that would not have made sense in any other congregation. The overwhelming

reason for this was the inclusion of particular people who were singled out for prayer, recognition, honor, or ministry.

At Tom's church (appendix 5), the elder commented on the fellowship taking place. A pastoral prayer mentioned families of the church. Another elder gave an announcement inviting volunteers to participate in a missions trip; he also tied the content of his announcement to the liturgy of the morning. A closing announcement was given welcoming visitors and inviting them to further information and conversation. Jack's church engaged in lengthy intercessory prayer for specific individuals and gave specific announcements related to the congregation. At Karl's church (appendix 8), it was the final Sunday for the senior pastor who was moving to a new ministry. Intention was taken to see that the focus was on the gospel of Christ and the glory of God, but there was a meaningful and emotional time of prayer and thanksgiving offered to the pastor and his family on their departure.

Brent's church (appendix 10) included a number of prayers of intercession for members mentioned by name. The second graders were publicly presented with Bibles as is the custom in the church. At James's church (appendix 16), a video from a family in the church welcomed members to the gathering. Announcements were given, being expressly tied to the liturgy. After a song, the worship leader said, "Because Christ is risen, we are new creations, and we can extend life and grace to others." From the statement, the leader gave opportunities to serve in the church in ministry.

At Ken's church (appendix 17), two retiring staff members were honored for their service in the church and were prayed over by the senior pastor. After an introduction highlighting the significance of pastoral prayer and inviting the people to pray with him as he prayed, the pastor then offered an additional lengthy intercessory prayer. At Ben's church (appendix 9), an elementary aged boy requesting baptism was recognized so that the congregation could welcome him into the church.

In the middle of the service at Larry's church (appendix 12), after songs and before the main message, the entire congregation paused for a unique time of public prayer and Scripture reading. Some members came with a Scripture passage to share with the congregation. Others were moved in the moment to read a certain passage. Prayers were given for specific members and for certain needs of the church. Members offered encouragements to one another or lifted prayers on behalf of others in the congregation.

Song selection. Every leader placed a high priority on the truth and theological richness in the songs selected. Mark focused on this aspect of the songs: "When we gather together, all of it is word-centric, word focused, and even in how we choose the songs to reflect the sermon text." Michael used this guardrail of truth and theological richness to eliminate songs for consideration in his church's canon: "Ministries that have demonstrated a lack of discernment on what we would call gospel essentials . . . are ones that we need not waste our time as a church to sing, to make a part of our liturgy. I try to stay away from songs that don't speak to the riches of theology." Larry asked, "What is lyrically the song saying? And does it have a proper biblical perspective of Christ Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit and a proper perspective of humanity?" Jack referred to singing to God as "basically praying melodically together." He explained the weight of the responsibility that he feels in selecting theologically true, doctrinally sound songs: "Worship leaders [are] putting words in your mouth and making you say them. I'm asking you not just to listen to something, but to do this to one another, to corporately disciple, one another [through] them. So I want to make sure again that it's guarded by gospel, truth, orthodox theology and all of those things."

Steve embodied the selectiveness of each of the leaders in terms of song choice and the preference for songs that have a timeless quality: "We're definitely going to lean towards choosing songs that manifest and embody and form a timelessness within us." Many of the leaders working with a set liturgy selected songs for where they fall in the

liturgical story. Brent said, “Song selection is much more about liturgical position than it is about the sermon. That said, oftentimes a sermon will play a secondary role in the kind of general themes that we might go off of. And the sermon most directly impacts, usually, the song that comes right before the sermon.”

In terms of the ability of a congregation to sing a song, James sums up the desires of every leader: “We want to sing songs that people of all sorts of musical backgrounds can physically sing along with. So I pay a lot of attention to singability and how a song and a melody and words might sort of land on the lips of the congregation.” Many spoke about a selectivity in introducing new songs more sparingly because of the desire for participation. Darren spoke about having his young daughter in mind when he makes song selection: “I wanted her to be able to engage with what’s going on to some extent. And the only way she’s going to be able to do that is if we’re singing some songs repeatedly. And because she couldn’t be able to read, she’s really just learning this through hearing them, so there’s got to be consistency and to some extent simplicity.”

Likewise, Karl spoke of song selection as “meal planning” for a multi-generational congregation: “You know I’m wanting to make sure that there are some songs that feel like Psalm 150 and are just entirely vertical and praise. But then there’s, other songs that are really talking about the emotional life of the soul and giving people the ability to kind of put language to things that are going on.”

When the songs are isolated from the orders of service and investigated for content and theme, the listing of each church’s song selections for the observed Sunday clearly showed a gospel progression. The exceptions were churches 5, 8, 9, and 10. All of these churches had a free liturgy and were more heavily influenced by the sermon text. This focus on the sermon text caused the song selection to be more “flat.” For example, for church 9, the message was focused on the mercy and forgiveness of God; consequently, each of the five songs followed those themes (appendix 13).

Other elements. Every service had nearly identical elements: Scripture readings, prayers by pastors and others (both extemporaneous and read), responsive or unison readings of creeds and confessions, announcements, sermons (varying in length from less than twenty minutes to nearly an hour), benedictory blessings, and the sending of the congregation out into the world. Below are a few representative observations of how the four tenets of a biblical theology of worship from the literature review were demonstrated in the course of worship services.

Revelation and response. In every service, the leaders encouraged the congregation to engage the gathering with a rhythm of God’s revelation and their response. There are a multitude of examples that run throughout each service since this rhythm was the character of the entire service. In Steve’s church (appendix 6), as in most of the services observed, the entire service was saturated with Scripture, and the congregation was encouraged to respond to each Scripture reading, including the following responsive word:

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.
People: Thanks be to God.

In confession, which included the heading “Lifting Contrite Hearts Up to the Lord,” a Scripture reading from Job prefaced a corporate prayer response, a hymn (“God Be Merciful to Me”), silent prayers of repentance, and a corporately read prayer of confession.

Brent’s church (appendix 10) was also filled with Scripture readings—from the Psalms, the Gospels of Luke and John, and 1 John. The collect featured a prayer from The Book of Prayer:

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:
Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that, by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever

hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.⁴

The other churches that followed a more historical, structured liturgy likewise had prompts built into the order of worship that encouraged the hearing of and response to God's Word.

Among the free-liturgy churches, the leaders showed concerted effort to help the congregations understand their responsibility to respond to God's Word as presented in many different forms. As an introduction to a song, Mark highlighted a line of the song that referenced the sermon that had just been offered. Throughout Tom's service, his transition words brought to mind Scriptures that had been read and tied them to songs to be sung. One elder prefaced the verses he was about to read with these words: "We're reminded of who we are and what he has done for us; let these words change us." The band members of Dave's church offered Scriptures that were meant to help the congregation to meditate on the presence of Christ in the midst of doubts. The call to worship at Jack's church was from Psalm 95. The elder reading the text reminded the people of the invitation inherent in the call to worship before reading: "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Ps 95:7-8). Ben's opening words, after Psalm 46:10, were to "see God for who He is and rest in the God of our salvation." Each church leader or others in leadership explicitly called the people to hear God's Word and to respond to that revelation.

The work of Christ. Again, each of the services with a historical liturgy focused on the season, which was centered on the person and work of Christ. Many of my observances were during the season of Eastertide, and so one service began with the

⁴ Thomas Cranmer, *Book of Common Prayer* (as recorded in appendix 10).

responsive declaration of “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!” and the singing of the hymn “This Joyful Eastertide.”

Four of the churches observed the Lord’s Supper, and it was a central component in three of those four. In Tom’s church, the sermon series was not explicitly about Christ’s work, but the pastor drew application that centered on Christ.

While in the structured liturgies, the songs were chosen for their function within the service, in the free liturgies, song lyrics were focused overwhelmingly on the person and work of Jesus. Larry transitioned from songs to an extended time of prayer by reading Hebrews 4:14-16 and then sharing the reality of Jesus’s humanity.

Community. There were many moments in all of the services when the community members were made conscious of one another and the leaders brought attention to the corporate nature of the gathering. Two churches incorporated the passing of the peace as part of the service; Amanda’s church incorporated the element via the Zoom video conference call. Also in Amanda’s church, as the pastor offered intercessory prayer for needs of the body, congregation members could enter prayer requests in the chat, and the pastor prayed for them in real time.

In Karl’s church, a staff couple was brought onto the stage and honored for their years of service. In Brent’s church, intercessory prayer included a number of names mentioned for prayer. In Karl’s church, the pastor and his family were prayed over as it was their last service. Every church included announcements of body life and personal words to congregation members. In two churches, families gave testimony videos either welcoming the people (as in James’s church) or offering a Scripture reading (as in Amanda’s church).

Call to discipleship. Each sermon had clear implications for Christian discipleship. The final words of many of the services were calls to live out the truths that had been expounded in the sermon. The closing prayer and blessing at Brent’s church

was “May these words bring forth the fruit of good living to the glory of Your [i.e., God’s] name.” At Dave’s church, a closing song (“Christ Be the Center of Our Lives”) was followed by the liturgist’s simple words to the congregation “You are sent.” Many of the prayers offered at free-liturgy churches were calls to respond to the truth that had been heard and to live in light of it. Tom’s church featured many prayers by elders who prayed prayers for discipleship (e.g., “Help us to seek and savor you above all else”; “Help us to be enamored, filled with the person of Christ so that the words of grace and mercy and life come out”). In Ben’s church, the leadership called on the people to respond to the truth that they had heard with the words “Rest and cease striving, through Jesus.”

Intention and Interaction

The question about “flow” in a worship service, left intentionally broad, allowed the leaders to express what were their highest priorities in planning. Many had an initial negative reaction to the term, expressing an aversion to arrangement of songs or elements solely based on music or desired emotional response. Jack said, “One of the hardest things is not letting the timbre of a song dictate its place in the flow of thought when it comes to worship and thought progression in worship.” Steve, as many others, differentiated between different uses or meanings of the term “flow”: “I think that word has taken on different connotations in the contemporary context of more of an emotional flow, and I don’t think that. If you mean the logical progression of the gospel, than absolutely.”

There was continued agreement on a positive denotation for “flow.” Brent expressed that he loved the term, which he defined as follows: “When I think of flow, I think of conceptual and emotional continuity. And tied in, that is certainly spiritual continuity, that the worship service is there to take us through an experience and a story and an arc and that flow is how well that story hangs together and takes me in a unified

fashion through it all.” Tom said, “The flow of our worship is really shaped by the presentation of the gospel and that is our aim.” Mark said that when he hears the term “flow,” he is “thinking of transitions and how things move from one direction, from one thing to the next, the flow of a Sunday morning, I want it to be intentional.” Amanda likewise said, “We want the pieces to make sense in a particular order and we want the pieces to work well, the transitions, going from one to another.”

Even with the cautions towards planning a service around solely musical or emotional ideas, many of the leaders acknowledged the natural emotional arc in a worship service and expressed the need to be attendant to the nature of the arts as they interact with the telling of the gospel on a Sunday morning. Jack communicated the task as “rearranging things to fit the lyrical flow of what needs to happen and then being sensitive to the timbre flow.” James talked about the “flow” of the gospel presentation in worship as a conversation:

Conversations of flow and feel have to do with how can we shepherd, you know, or steward, maybe, an experience for the worshipping body that makes sense, that there’s a coherence to the movements and moments, . . . and I almost hate to use this word, but a logical flowing there of the various moments, not in a rational way, but I guess, does it sound like a conversation with a friend? And there’s these ups and downs and things get a little more intense and then they back off as . . . the natural sort of outpouring of speech and language and conversation.

Not only were the worship services intentional in their arrangement, but also leaders were intentional in how they shepherded their congregations through the services. The prepared words of the fixed liturgies were very instructive in aiding congregation members to understand what they were engaging and why they were engaging it. Where the liturgy was freer, most of the leaders were very purposed in providing instruction to congregation members as to how to understand the significance of what they were doing.

The most structured liturgies had the most detailed instructions, to be followed throughout the service. On the first page of the printed liturgy at Amanda’s church, instruction was given for congregation members to gather items prior to the service, since

it was virtual rather than live. These items included a pitcher of water and a bowl, a candle, and bread and wine or juice. Sheet music was printed as part of the worship folder. Other notes included explanatory remarks, such as before the pouring of the water into a bowl: “We remember our baptism by pouring the water into a bowl. You may pour water into a bowl in your own home along with the liturgist” (appendix 15). Amanda’s church was the only one I observed where the leader interviewed did not play an active leadership role or speak during the worship service. Amanda was truly a behind-the-scenes coordinator and equipper of other speakers, pastors, and musicians.

Brent’s church also featured a very detailed worship folder, with headings for every service element (appendix 10). Much less-explicit instruction was offered by leaders during the service itself, which was in-person. Brent led the congregational singing and the ensemble but had no other speaking role in the service—in contrast to other leaders I observed.

Steve’s church also had a very detailed worship folder (appendix 6). Like Brent’s church, Steven’s church had a corporate confession of sin printed in the folder to be read aloud by the congregation. Steve functioned as the song leader and main liturgist for the day, leading the spoken prayers and readings and providing detailed instruction throughout the service. At the beginning, before the greeting, he offered language that highlighted the work of the Triune God in saving, calling, and gathering the church to worship:

We have come together this morning not because we found God, but because He found us. He sought us, when we were lost in our trespasses and sins and he gathers us together this morning through the sacrificial atonement of his Son and our Savior Jesus Christ. And now the Holy Spirit of God sanctifies us daily, making us more like our Savior.

Guiding statements like the one above helped to underscore the gospel contour of the liturgy and contextualize it for the specific service that week. The above example was

both an introductory word and a framing invitation to the Lord's Supper that would follow later in the service.

James's church also had a fixed, rooted liturgy (appendix 16). A family gave a greeting by video, reminding the church body of the season and positioning the service within the church calendar: "The Lord be with you. In this Eastertide season we set our minds on Christ, our resurrected Savior and Lord who rose from the dead to take away the sins of the world. So let us prepare our hearts, minds and bodies to worship our God as the ensemble leads us." There was no written worship folder, but as the entire congregation was worshipping virtually, there were headings that denoted each section of the service, and liturgists made many connecting comments. At the beginning, after the greeting and first song, "Call to Worship" appeared on the screen while one of the singers spoke these words:

Today as we continue to celebrate the resurrection, we echo the good news: Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. And as the apostle Paul says, "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds that are on above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:1-3). Let's continue to worship as we sing together.

After a song, the words of Paul in Colossians were used again to remind the congregation to confess sin, silently and then corporately:

Father God, we have been raised with Christ. We are new creations: but we confess that sometimes we fall into old patterns. We do not see the image of God in others, or ourselves. We are focused on our own lives, and forget to seek the things that are above, where Christ is. We use our words to hurt rather than heal. We draw lines about who's in and who's out. Lord have mercy.

These words led to silent prayer, and then the assurance of pardon in the form of the sung *Agnus Dei*.

Dave's church functioned similarly to James's. There was a printed bulletin with the following headings: "Gathering (God unites us in His presence to remember the story of God)," "Word (God speaks to us through His Word)," "Thanksgiving (We respond to God's Word in thanksgiving and fellowship)," and "Sending (God blesses us

and sends us out to do His mission in the world)” (appendix 11). Though there were various speakers, the church had one primary liturgist for the service I observed. Her words both highlighted different parts of the liturgy and related expressly to the sermon. During the call to worship, she offered this prayer:

Loving Jesus, you are alive and risen, always present through your Spirit among us. In seasons when we don't recognize you or hear your voice, help us to cling in faith to your word, so that when we gather over a meal or at your table with our brothers and sisters, we might see you once again and be comforted. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we pray, Amen.

The above prayer directly referenced the sermon that would follow, which was based on the account of Jesus and the two disciples on the Emmaus road from Luke 24. I observed this interweaving of the church season, the gospel shape, and the sermon text of the day throughout the service.

The remaining churches I observed followed a freer liturgical tradition, although some of them had fixed elements. At Tom's church, the service began with the reading of Psalm 36:5-9, which ends with the words “with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light” (v. 9). These verses, coupled with Tom's clear invitation for the people to “worship the fountain of life, our Lord Jesus Christ,” formed a clear call to worship (appendix 5). The following Scripture reading came from Romans 3:10-12, 18: “As it is written: none is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. . . . There is no fear of God before their eyes.” The following prayer by an elder included these words: “Lord, the reality of this passage is that we need You and the undeserving grace of our Savior. We get so entangled by the distractions of this world . . . ; our treasure and hope can only be in You. Help us to confess our sins and turn from our sins.” The placement of this prayer in the service made clear that these elements were to function as a confession of sin, and the following song (“In Christ Alone”) was intended as an assurance of pardon. In my interview with Tom, he indicated his goal for

those in attendance at the worship gathering: “I want them to see a representation of the gospel; we try to make that shape of the gospel present or evident in every service.”

Karl’s church (appendix 8) also had limited fixed elements but had a stated call to worship in the form of a Scripture reading (Ps 147:1, 3-5). The service I observed marked the final day for their senior pastor. This significant event in the life of the church family colored song selection and added elements to the service. The song “Your Labor Is Not in Vain,” recently introduced, was used to fit the gospel contour of the service as well as to encourage and honor the outgoing pastor.

Churches 1, 3, 10, 11, and 12 observed the Lord’s Supper. Michael’s church uniquely organized the entire service around the ordinance. After some informal announcements, Michael and the team led three songs focused specifically on the cross of Christ (appendix 14). The time of the Lord’s Supper was intentional as well, led by an associate pastor. After a reading of 1 Peter 3:18, the invitation was given to celebrate Christ’s death. The congregation read a prayer that functioned both as a corporate confession and preparation to partake of the elements responsively with the leader. After the responsive prayer, there was singing, silent prayer, and then partaking of the elements. The sermon that morning was entitled “The Death Christ Died.”

Jack’s church also centered their service uniquely around the observance of the Lord’s Table (appendix 7). After a stated call to worship from Psalm 95, the songs began with a statement of God’s creation, reflecting Jack’s desire to tell the fullness of the gospel in every service: “The gospel to me starts with . . . creation, and then continues all the way on through the eschaton into glorification. All of those elements need to be there, so creation, fall, redemption, restoration and glorification.” The opening songs led to a read prayer from the Heidelberg Catechism, intercessory prayer, and then a sermon entitled “Getting Our House in Order” from Ephesians 4:17-4:32. The Lord’s Supper was described as an opportunity to confess sin and rejoice in forgiveness. Time was given for

private reflection and prayer, after which the elements were served and some response songs were sung.

Summary of Planning Considerations

The leaders' focus on planning the worship gathering was intended to help their churches to hear and interact with the gospel. A structured liturgy ensured that this progression would take place in the service. Churches for which the sermon text was a primary organizing principle still took care in individual service elements, but there was not the same level of progression in thought throughout the service. Still, the result in every service I observed was congregation members' deep anticipation of and preparation to hear the Word preached in the sermon. The other elements of the service all led the congregation to engage with God's Word and to be called to discipleship. Songs either served the liturgy or the sermon text, and all served to articulate the gospel.

To varying degrees, attendees of each church were reminded that they belonged to the larger church of Jesus Christ; in every case, congregation members were encouraged towards greater unity and affection with their own body of believers. The exemplars had clearly planned the gatherings with their individual local assembly in mind. Because each church had a unique character, the song selection varied greatly depending on the church. A few songs were used in multiple churches, but most sang unique songs.

Not only were leaders intentional in the planning of the gathering and in ensuring that each element of the service fit together, but they were also concerned with how church members understood what was taking place during the service. Either through written instruction or verbal communication, leaders conducting the services carefully shepherded their congregations in how to fully participate in the service.

Preparation

When asked “What does your congregation know about the service prior to the service?” most of the worship leaders mentioned some advance information that is provided to the people in order for them to be prepared to engage the content. Jack said, “Historically, I’ve preferred to get the songs out early to them, usually with YouTube links or things like that, so people can prepare, especially if there’s a new song.” For his church’s Sunday morning service, James provides the Scripture text, a playlist of songs to be sung, as well as typed-out prayers for confession or other moments in the service. Karl sends out an email on Saturday with songs and a theme text written out, and congregation members are able to click through the service order. Amanda sends out an email at the beginning of the week that talks about the sermon text. She said, “The preachers will provide a couple of leading questions to help people in their home devotions with thinking through the passage for the week. And then we also usually talk about a song or another element of the liturgy that will be present that coming Sunday.”

For churches with a more fixed liturgical structure, the leaders commented that the congregation would already have significant knowledge of the content that would be engaged. In response to the question of what the people would know about the service, Brent said, “Nearly everything, because it’s the same service. They know what the liturgy is, they know what Scripture passages are going to be read. They know what to do because we utilize the lectionary.” Amanda echoed these sentiments: “The general form of the liturgy is going to be the same where we do Communion every Sunday. We start with gathering and then we read the Scripture, have the sermon move into Communion, and then we are sent out - that general structure every week.”

James described the benefit that giving advance information brought to his congregation: “Our people were able to just be more present and enter into the things of the morning after having a little heads up.” Still, the overwhelming sentiment was that though the preparation was helpful, the ultimate goal of leading the people in worship

was not about a particular response to a particular text. Instead, the long-term work of each leader and planner was to help foster an expectation of an encounter with God that spills over into daily life. The leaders' key concern seemed to be how the congregation engaged the content and the Christian life, and the worship service was the place where the people were challenged to that life of discipleship. Karl summarized the sentiments of many of the leaders well:

My goal would just be that my people understand God's word. They understand how to interpret, how to believe it. I want Christians to know, you know like the Puritan phraseology of "read the Bible, pray the Bible, sing the Bible." "I was edified because it was just chock full of truth, the meal that I was taking in was just very nutrient rich, but it's not all about the meal itself." And so it really is the means by which we encounter God and so I want there to be an anticipation, which is something that's not just produced from the front.

Application

When asked the question "What should your congregation take away from a worship service?" nearly every leader answered in general and far-reaching terms rather than in terms of a specific service, as in an application from a particular sermon. Even though the previous five questions related to specific service elements, the responses took a longer view when it came to the "takeaway" for congregants. The exemplars interviewed seemed to see their ministry as an ongoing work that would be measured not Sunday by Sunday but life by life and over longer periods of time.

For some, the goal was simply that people would leave knowing that they had been in the presence of God. Amanda's desire was that the worship service would be a "thin place," where heaven and earth were in close proximity, and that the presence of God would be recognized by church members. Tom also highlighted how having a right view of God was a basic and central concern in corporate worship: "One of the reasons we don't respond to God appropriately or we don't really respond to worship is that we don't really grasp who or what we're worshipping." He went on to talk about how the

presentation of the whole gospel in the worship gathering was so crucial to a full-orbed understanding of who God is.

Ken wants his church to leave with a right view of who God is, and he expressed that if the content and spirit of the service presents that right view of God, then nonbelievers may feel out of place. He continued, saying, “We want everyone to feel like they belong and have a place here, but I also think there is a value and beauty to someone walking in that’s a nonbeliever and feeling out of place because they understand that ‘there’s something off here.’ And I feel like more than pushing them away from the church, it could definitely draw them in.” Ken’s hope is that the gospel presentation that is inherent in his church’s worship service will be used by God to reveal the need in a nonbeliever’s life.

Likewise, Mark referenced 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, which reads, “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.” Mark went on to say, “I want people to take away that we’ve been singing, we’ve been praying, when we’ve been listening to God speak to us in his word.” Mark also emphasized a desire that the words of the songs would cause people to reflect on God’s glorious character and on the work of salvation.

A few leaders specifically referenced their own leadership, with a desire that the spirit of their leading would draw people to greater discipleship. Michael expressed the following:

I think they should take away that we are leading humbly, As people who are in process, just like they are people that are being renewed into the likeness of God very slowly, but by a very patient and compassionate God, one who is absolutely holy and one who is also so incredibly kind. And if they think that myself or any of the other staff or elders have it all together, then we’ve really missed the mark.

Ben expressed his desire thus: “I’m always pointing the attention to the Lord. We truly believe our goal is that people wouldn’t walk away from [church 9] saying, ‘that was a great song or sermon,’ but instead, ‘what a great God we serve.’”

Many leaders made their central goal the congregation’s hearing, understanding, and appropriating of the gospel. Mark said, “I want people to be aware afresh of what he’s [i.e., God has] done for us in Christ, rehearsing the gospel.” Karl wants his congregation to takeaway “that God is supremely valuable that Jesus blood is precious, that it’s amazing that the Spirit is at work among us at. It’s an amazing thing to be God’s church, and we get to love him, and isn’t that amazing.” Brent expressed it similarly: “In a nutshell, the gospel. But I would say what I hope more concretely is that overwhelmingly they have heard and received that God in Christ loves and forgives them and that in that love and forgiveness, they’re empowered to new life.” Steve also articulated the long view:

I’m not looking for some sort of immediate effect, the measure of whether we are worshipping week to week is whether or not we’re seeing progressive, steady, long term spiritual growth. So it’s not something you can measure in the moment, although there will be momentary there will be things that happen in the moment. But that that that’s not our measure of success in a service. Our measure is, am I, is this contributing to my progressive growth in the Lord?

Many of the leaders acknowledged their desire that the true fruit of the corporate worship gathering and the takeaway for worshipers would be seen in individual lives as the Holy Spirit revealed personal implications and growth areas. Larry desires that “hearts of the people would be changed by the Holy Spirit, through God’s Word.” Jack’s goal is that the congregation members take away assurance of salvation of Christ and that they are stretched in their thinking towards specific application of the sermon in their contexts. He explained, “We try to give application in the sermons to apply the Word. But we also don’t work at your office. So we can give you general suggestions, but we want you thinking about how to apply it.” Dave echoed this sentiment: “I hope they take away something to add to their life in terms of a habit or a questions to discuss

with someone, or with clarity of something that they should give up from the life, as well as a reaffirmation of God's invitation into his work.”

Generally, the more experience a leader had, the longer and larger the view that he/she took when evaluating the goals of a worship service. The references to specific songs or Scriptures making specific application from one week to the next were limited to the worship leaders who had the least amount of experience in vocational ministry.

Summary of Preparation and Application

Most of the leaders were careful to provide specifics about the service prior to Sunday. This included links to recordings of songs and lyrics, Scriptures to be read, and sermon texts. The expectation for what congregation members were to take away from the service, however, was not related to specific service elements or sermon application.

Conclusion

The findings in this chapter represent the opinions and perceptions of exemplar worship leaders regarding their own worship planning priorities and processes as well as my observations of worship services that these exemplar worship leaders planned and led. The following chapter provides implications and conclusions drawn from the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the planning practices and corporate worship gatherings of exemplar church leaders who recognize significant convergence between the biblical aims of corporate worship and Christian discipleship. Chapter 1 introduced the primary problem, that though most church leaders would affirm the spiritual benefit and centrality of corporate worship in the life of believers, few of those same churches adequately relate corporate worship practice to the discipleship process. However, though intentional planning may be lacking, when leaders in local churches affirm the convergence between worship and discipleship, they will plan corporate gatherings with a view towards spiritual growth.

Three main questions guided this study:

1. To what extent does the church intentionally incorporate worship practice as a part of the disciple-making process?
2. To what extent do corporate worship practices or specific elements lead to and impact spiritual growth?
3. How do leaders prepare their congregations to perceive and engage corporate worship as part of the discipleship pathway?

Chapter 2 reviewed the related literature. A biblical overview revealed scholarly consensus regarding some major themes related to worship. A similar study through the New Testament on Christian discipleship yielded significant areas of convergence with the worship themes. A study of liturgical history showed that the weekly corporate formalized gathering of Christian disciples was prepared for the purpose of praise, remembrance, saturation in the Scriptures, mutual edification, and a recommitment to the discipleship task. Finally, a review of many contemporary resources

that are designed to equip leaders and planners to think biblically and pastorally revealed a gap in the literature in terms of explicitly drawing these lines between worship and discipleship in practical terms for planners and congregation members.

Chapter 3 presented the study methodology. Chapter 4 analyzed findings from the study. The current chapter explains the research implications and study applications, addresses limitations to the research, evaluates the research design, and suggests additional research that others might undertake in this subject area.

Research Implications

Research Question 1: Intentional Incorporation

The first question regards the extent to which the church intentionally incorporates worship practice as a part of the disciple-making process. In order to determine whether there was intentional incorporation on a programming level, the answers should have reflected a well-formed view of discipleship, an understood connection between worship and discipleship, and articulated goals for the congregation that both relate to and transcend the Sunday gathering.

When given the question ahead of time, most of the leaders had very robust answers for a definition of worship, as reported in chapter 4. In comparison, leaders generally had much less-developed answers for their definitions of discipleship, even under the same conditions and with the same opportunity for advance preparation. Also, while the worship definitions from the exemplars had much in common with each other, the discipleship definitions were much more varied. Though many leaders mentioned their church's discipleship pathway or programs by citing small groups and accountability groups, only one mentioned the corporate worship gathering as part of that pathway. Also, the discipleship goals expressed, though transcending the Sunday gathering, were not explicitly related to the gathering. My conclusion from this data is

that exemplars are not making an intentional programmatic connection between worship practice and ongoing discipleship.

Every church leader I interviewed had a pastoral desire to see the congregation grow in Christ and to grow as a result of the gathering. Ben said, “We’ve got a bunch of people swimming in the shallow waters and our job is to pull people into the deep waters to know Jesus, and to be involved in helping others know and love Jesus.” James expressed his goal for his congregation thus: “The integration of, you know, to be able to say my faith in Christ has to do with literally everything that I do and say and think about.” Karl refused to separate worship and edification: “All the descriptions of congregational gatherings are not described as worship. In the New Testament, it’s the language of edification. And so it’s worship God and edify one another as God works.” The exemplar church leaders certainly had their fellow disciples in mind as they planned the service.

This pastoral desire was expressed throughout each worship service. Calls to discipleship were evident throughout each service. It was clear in the explicit rhythm of God’s revelation and the believer’s response that the worship service was to lead to greater conformity to Christ. It was also clear in the sheer amount of time given to preaching, which took up more time than any other element in each gathering (table 2). Intentional comments by the worship leaders during the services revealed pastoral concern and pointed the congregation beyond the individual and beyond the assembly, such as Ben’s comments regarding an individual’s preparing for baptism, Mark’s transition from announcements of church events into formal worship, or Amanda’s church’s sharing prayer requests in real time through Zoom. Each planner had an evident partnership with the teaching pastor, and the sermon was the apex of every service I observed. The earnest expectation of each leader was that the church would be prepared to hear the sermon and to respond to it beyond the assembly.

I conclude that when worship leaders are planning services from a robust theology of worship and are planning as those entrusted with pastoral responsibility for their people, there is a natural incorporation of discipleship in the context of the corporate gathering. The leaders and planners of the gatherings are directing the congregation to live in light of what they hear and experience. They are prompting the people to engage the gathering as truth to which they should respond.

However, I did not observe incorporation that informed the actual programming or planning of the worship service. Part of intentional incorporation must be that those engaged in the service understand the event as part of the discipleship pathway. With some limited exceptions, this kind of intentional instruction is not taking place. Some understanding of the connection between worship and discipleship was present in the leaders to varying degrees, but it does not result in what could be considered “intentional incorporation.”

Research Question 2: Specific Connections

The second question involves the extent to which specific corporate worship practices or specific service elements lead to and impact spiritual growth. How did each specific worship element point the congregation beyond the individual to the larger community as well as beyond the Sunday assembly to life outside the assembly? And how did the leader curate these worship elements for the congregation so that the people understood how they were to relate to each element and to the service as a whole?

As observed in the scriptural study of chapter 2, biblically faithful worship is concomitant with spiritual growth. The second research question, though, concerns whether there is a specific practice or worship element that leads to growth. It was evident that the exemplars did not plan certain individual corporate worship elements with particular spiritual growth goals in mind. For each leader, the whole is truly greater than the sum of its parts. Each leader was motivated to look at the bigger picture of the

entire service. For those who were planning for churches with more structured liturgies, the order of service had a natural flow that encouraged continued discipleship outside the assembly. The historical liturgy became a natural guardian for the church, or at least the worship leaders surveyed viewed the liturgy in this way. That is, they believed that having the liturgy ensured that the worship service would be a representation of the gospel, calling people to give thanks for forgiveness, prompting them to hear and respond to the preached Word of God, and sending them out into the world as disciples. For those planners who did not have the built-in structure of an historical liturgy, their goals were still broader than thinking of one particular worship element's leading to a step of discipleship.

Still, because each of the exemplars choose songs, much of their criteria for choosing each one revolved around larger discipleship goals. Each leader places a high priority on the centrality of God's Word in corporate worship and desires for the church to interact with and respond to God's Word in the gathering. James talked about "representing the language of Scripture in [their] songs." His committee begins their planning by reading the sermon text. Possible themes—related Scriptures, songs, and prayers—all flow out of the sermon text discussion because of the committee's desire to help the people to be immersed in Scripture and respond to it. James continued, "So, yeah, I think just starting our worship planning with Scripture is kind of our on ramp. And then everything that comes from that theoretically is attempts to be an expression of that starting point." When Darren discussed his criteria for songs, he talked about the larger discipleship goal that underlies every choice and certainly transcends the experience in the assembly:

I want to sing God exalting, theologically informed songs, great songs that are going to help people to live well, that can help them suffer. They're going to die. That's where we're all headed. And I want to prepare people for that. Nobody on their deathbed is asking, "Hey, can I listen to the sermon from April twenty six, 2004?" They're saying, "can we sing that song?"

Certain elements of worship were shown to help foster a community-consciousness within the gathering. Brent mentioned his church's informal fellowship time, the passing of the peace, as "a pretty significant time where I think there should be a horizontal activity. I think it's liturgically symbolic that it happens right after we're reconciled to God, that we're embodying reconciliation with one another through passing the peace of Christ." Others mentioned Communion as significant for reminding each individual of his/her participation with the rest of the body.

Rightly engaged then, corporate worship service elements do lead to and impact spiritual growth. In the exemplar churches, songs were introduced and presented not as performances to be experienced or to create a particular atmosphere but as vehicles for the truth of the gospel. Though some service elements lacked explanation or contextualization, I did not observe any element that was planned to stand alone. To the extent that a service element served the larger purpose or "flow" of the service, each service element had the potential to contribute to and impact congregation members' spiritual growth.

Research Question 3: Congregational Preparation

The last question asks how leaders prepare their congregations to perceive and engage corporate worship as part of the discipleship pathway. This question involves both what happens between Sunday services and what happens in the service. The study was limited in its investigation of what happens between Sunday services. As noted in chapter 4, the leaders' answers to the question "What does your congregation know about the service prior to the service?" varied widely. In some cases, leaders provide more information to their congregants about the sermon text and songs. The fixed liturgy of some churches was again a reliable guide for the people. However, even when leaders provided more information to congregation members, they did not do so in a way that would encourage the church to perceive the service as being a part of the discipleship

pathway. Only one church had the active engagement of the senior pastor, who provided a home study for the people to participate in as they anticipated the Sunday morning worship gathering.

Within the services I observed, each leader was clearly preparing his/her congregation to worship and to grow in Christ. Steve summarized well the sentiments of the leaders: “I want [church members] to be confronted with the gospel. I’m contributing in the service toward their spiritual maturity, their relationship with God through Christ, their communion with God and then in the other six days of the week living out a life of worship in obedience to what God has commanded.” This sentiment could be observed in all of the church services I observed in this study. Examples of intentional congregational preparation abound in the churches with a more fixed liturgy. In Amanda’s church, every service element was delineated and detailed, and members were encouraged to engage each element with purpose. A reading of Scripture was prefaced by a reminder “that Christ is with us as we hear the Word of God.” A song was introduced with the following words:

Blessed are you, strong and faithful God, and worthy are you to receive our thanks and praise. You made the earth in all its goodness and abundance, and you created humankind in your image to care for it. When we turned away, you remained faithful, sending your only Son to overcome the power of sin and death by his glorious resurrection. Therefore, with the women at the tomb, the apostles in the upper room, and the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth, we sing with joy (appendix 15).

The final “sending” benediction came from Hebrews 13:20: “May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make us perfect in all goodness so that we may do God’s will through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever” (appendix 15).

In James’s church, this same kind of intention was seen in the formal words throughout the service that framed each worship element and meshed it with the liturgy of the day. There was also a dual call to worship of sorts, with a formal invitation by the

pastor to engage in worship and a more informal recorded greeting from a church family (appendix 16).

Many examples of intentional congregational preparation could be seen in the freer worship expressions as well. At Karl's church, the final Sunday for a beloved pastor was framed during the call to worship as a day of worship, merging the real-life experience of the congregation and the ultimate purpose of praise (appendix 8). At Ben's church, an additional welcome offered a sermon preview that tied everything that was to follow to the sermon text and the imperative to live in response to it (appendix 9). At Ken's church, a lengthy confessional reading was carefully explained, as was the pastoral prayer (appendix 17). By these kinds of intentional and careful words, those attending the worship gatherings at any one of these churches were purposefully and repeatedly prompted to informed worship and a life of discipleship.

Both by their careful, consistent planning of the service from week to week and by their interaction with the congregation throughout the service, the exemplar church leaders were training church members as to how they should perceive and engage worship. Each church had a clear "culture" into which congregation members were immersed on Sunday mornings.

List of Specific Considerations

The following list describes specific components, emphases, or strategies that leaders considered in their planning in order to help their congregations to perceive and engage worship as part of the discipleship pathway. While no worship service manifested every one of these components, and most were deficient in more than one of the components, the statements below outline specific considerations that emerge from the data overall:

1. Weekly corporate worship gatherings planned for Christian disciples articulate the gospel. This articulation of the gospel relates not only to individual songs or Scriptures but also to the overall contour of the service.

2. Weekly corporate worship gatherings planned for Christian disciples interact meaningfully with the sermon text, connecting it with other elements of the liturgy and preparing the congregation to hear and respond to it.
3. Weekly corporate worship gatherings planned for Christian disciples recognize the life of the local individual body of believers as well as the larger body of Christ.
4. Weekly corporate worship gatherings planned for Christian disciples are led by multiple leaders who share an understanding of the purpose of the corporate gathering and their individual roles in the service.
5. Weekly corporate worship gatherings planned for Christian disciples include intentional words in between worship elements to guide the people in understanding.

Explanation of Specific Considerations

The following discussion offers a brief summary of each of the considerations listed above. Full evidence for these appears in the findings analysis in chapter 4.

Gospel. *Weekly corporate worship gatherings planned for Christian disciples articulate the gospel.* This articulation of the gospel was the central concern for the worship planners interviewed. A query of the word “gospel” showed that the word was used 151 times in the interviews alone. When I asked questions about the goal of the worship service, the structure of the worship service, and the content and arrangement of songs, the gospel formed a part of the answer more than any other component. The three leaders for whom the gospel figured the least prominently in their answer had considerably less longevity in ministry than the others. This certainly is not to imply that any leader had low regard for the gospel. However, longevity in ministry did seem to correspond to a broadening of planning priority—to seeing the gospel as an overarching structure for corporate worship. Those with lesser longevity in ministry gave more weight and attention to the truth and content of particular songs; those with greater longevity in ministry tended to see how the entire service structure and how each song contributed to that articulation of the gospel.

A Sunday service that has been planned so that believers will be more conformed to Jesus Christ will be, as Jack said, a “gospel centered Sunday.” For those

with a freer liturgical structure, the key song criterion was “Do they, together, articulate the gospel?” For those with a more-structured liturgy, the songs served the liturgy, which—as an internal structure—served the gospel. Each of the more rooted liturgies clearly presented, in Bryan Chappell’s words, “the progress of the gospel in the life of an individual.”¹

Sermon text. *Weekly corporate worship gatherings planned for Christian disciples interact meaningfully with the sermon text.* The worship leaders prepared their congregations to perceive and engage corporate worship by interacting with the sermon text in their planning. For each church, the sermon came at a significant point in the service, and each service was oriented around the text of the sermon. The services with rooted liturgies naturally anticipated the proclamation of God’s Word in the sermon, and nearly all of the services with freer traditions did as well. The only exception was church 9, a service where all elements led from the sermon (appendix 13). In all but three services, not only was the structure built around the sermon, but also the individual service elements—including songs, Scriptures, and other readings—were tailored to explicitly relate to the sermon. Table 3, in chapter 4, lists each church leader’s incorporation of the sermon text into the remainder of the worship service.

Body life. *Weekly corporate worship gatherings planned for Christian disciples recognize the life of the local individual body of believers as well as the larger body of Christ.* The worship leaders prepared their congregation to perceive and engage corporate worship by their attention to the individual church’s needs and concerns in their planning. Each church was prompted to think as a body of people connected to one another and as citizens of a larger kingdom community. The exemplars highlighted not

¹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 86.

only the church's set-apart nature but also the church as a family. Pastoral and intercessory prayers for members, the recognition of new members to the church or of candidates for baptism, and the honoring of long-serving staff members—all of these very personal elements reminded the church family that they were not just a loose collection of individuals gathered in the same space but a body with intertwining lives. Personal elements also served to disassociate the service from a performance or presentation. Each service truly felt like a gathering of believers, a meeting of a family with mutual allegiance to Christ.

Participation. *Weekly corporate worship gatherings planned for Christian disciples are led by multiple leaders who share an understanding of the purpose of the corporate gathering and their individual roles in the service.* In all of the services I observed, multiple members participated in various ways. Song leadership, prayer, the giving of announcements, Scripture readings, and the offering of testimonies were all done by members of the body besides the senior pastor and worship leader. The average number of participants in each service was eleven (see table 2).

Just as the inclusion of personal prayer requests, announcements, and other church-specific elements made the worship service feel less like a performance and more like a family gathering, that “family feeling” increased in proportion to the number of lay people involved in leading the service. Amanda's service had the most overall participants, and Tom's had the most involvement by lay leaders.

Not only did many participate in the service, but they also shared leadership. Every participant in every service demonstrated an understanding of his/her role within the service and aided in strengthening cohesion with the larger purpose of the gathering. Especially in Tom's church, Amanda's church, Ben's church, and James's church, the volunteers who participated contributed intentionally to the thought progression of the day. They either called attention to the sermon text, or connected previous service

elements to what was to come, or highlighted the season of the church year. This purposeful participation showed that intentional training and mentoring had taken place. Tom talked about how the elders of his church have responded to his training and implementation of a gospel-shaped service:

For the past eight nine months [the elders] have been modeling that prayer of repentance and modeling intercessory prayer for people in some powerful ways. Even our benediction, instead of just reading scripture, they'll often come and say "hey this is why we do this . . . , this is what God is calling us to do, so even as we speak these words of the Lord, consider how he wants you to respond to them, and just as God You are lovingly shepherding our people . . . ," and in the way that we shape our services, folks aren't talking about the music, they're not talking about the songs.

Intention. *Weekly corporate worship gatherings planned for Christian disciples include intentional words in between worship elements to guide the people in understanding.* Care is taken not only in the content and placement of service elements but also in the words spoken in between elements. Nearly every leader used connecting comments or verbal transitions to help the congregation to understand not only the corporate worship service elements themselves but also how those elements should be rightly understood and engaged as part of the service.

Church year. *Weekly corporate worship gatherings planned for Christian disciples incorporate the church calendar to varying degrees.* In comparison with the three major interacting planning priorities (gospel, sermon text, and body life), the worship services were the most varied in terms of whether and how they recognized the liturgical calendar. Out of the fourteen worship services observed, five churches utilized the liturgical year as a prominent organizing principle. Three churches explicitly mentioned the church season and underscored some component of the historical liturgy as a teaching time or unifying moment. One of these three churches made reference to the season, and the sermon text and other elements of the service suggested harmony with the church calendar. The other two churches, though the liturgical calendar did not figure

prominently in planning or presentation, included other historical components. Six churches made no reference at all to the time or season, even those times that were close to Holy Week or the season of Eastertide. Table 4, in chapter 4, lists each church's acknowledgment and incorporation of the church season.

My observations of exemplars did not merit the annual church calendar's inclusion as one of the primary considerations. The reservations of Bradshaw, Westerholm and others are instructive. However, for those churches that engaged the church calendar, there was a deeper sense of the church as a set-apart community. The liturgy and the church calendar also formed a pervasive reminder for the disciple that he/she is part of a larger community. When I engaged in the worship services of each of these churches, I experienced a greater sense of belonging between members as well as a sense that we were connected to a larger whole. For this reason, I included the church year as a helpful tool in the matrix below.

Research Applications

From the guiding theological principles from Scripture regarding biblical worship, the answers provided by the exemplars in interviews, and the observations from worship services the exemplars planned and led, both a matrix and a rubric can be constructed. The matrix includes many of the elements to be considered when planning a worship service while affirming the convergence between worship and discipleship. The rubric provides guiding principles for evaluation of the service according to the biblical directives of worship and discipleship.

When the above considerations are taken together, they form a matrix that could be helpful for other worship leaders to similarly prepare their congregations for spiritual growth in the context of the corporate gathering (see table 5 below). The matrix includes three overarching guiding principles. The top (or first) row ("Church Year") reminds the planner of the time in the liturgical year, in case its inclusion/incorporation is

desired. The second row (“Sermon Text”) is for the sermon text as well as sermon series ideas. The first column (“Gospel Shape”) contains the elements of an historical liturgy and follows the progress of the gospel. The second column (“Service Element”) is for the order of service and service elements (e.g., songs, Scripture readings, prayers, testimonies). The third column (“How”) refers to the organizing principle above entitled “intention.”

The question of intention is how the leader will prompt the congregation either to understand the element or to connect the service element to what is to come next in the service. Three rows are provided for each service element: the top row denotes an introductory word; the middle row relates to specific leadership during the execution of the element, and the last row denotes a closing word or connecting word to the next element. The fourth column (“Who”) refers the leader to the one who will be leading each worship element, encouraging shared leadership. The last two columns (“Local” and “Larger”) relate to the “body life” consideration listed above—that corporate worship should remind congregation members of their own local body as well as the larger body of Christ. As planners utilize the matrix, they can be prompted to consider how certain worship elements cultivate a greater consciousness of the community.

Table 5. Matrix for spiritual growth through corporate worship

Church Year					
Sermon Text					
Gospel Shape	Service Element	How	Who	Local	Larger
Adoration					
Confession					

Table 5 continued

Church Year					
Sermon Text					
Gospel Shape	Service Element	How	Who	Local	Larger
Assurance					
Thanksgiving					
Instruction					
Communion					
Commission					

Based on the literature review, data gleaned in interviews, and observations of worship services, the following statements form an evaluative rubric for worship leaders and planners who are crafting corporate gatherings as part of the discipleship pathway of their congregations. Additionally, the rubric could be utilized for congregation members, helping them to recognize the major worship and discipleship goals of corporate gatherings they attend.

1. Did the service fit the contour of the gospel story?
2. Was the person and work of Christ central to the service's content?
3. Did the sermon serve as the apex of the service?
4. Was the service structured for proper anticipation of the preached Word?
5. Was the service structured with ample opportunity given for preparation to hear and respond to the preached Word?

6. Were there clear calls to discipleship given within the gathering?
7. Were congregation members encouraged to respond outside the gathering?
8. Did the service help the congregation members to be conscious of one another?
9. Were congregation members pointed to the unique needs of their local assembly?
10. Were congregation members reminded of their belonging to the larger church?
11. Did multiple members participate in leading the service?
12. Did the members participate intentionally, with knowledge of their role and the purpose of the element?
13. Did all participants make conscious connection to other elements of the worship service?

Research Limitations

Because I used purposive snowball sampling, the initial phase of the study was limited to worship scholars and practitioners with whom I was already familiar. This snowball sampling method also restricted me from receiving any other recommendations or contacting any exemplars myself.

Evaluation of Research Design

Strengths

The research design for this study manifested multiple strengths. First, the purposive snowball sample of experts drawn from multiple sources broadened the field of church leaders represented in the study. Additionally, it was crucial that each expert have a level of understanding of my project's goals and a strong underlying theology.

Second, the intentional incorporation of a broad spectrum of evangelical perspectives was a strength of this study. Traditions represented included Wesleyan, Reformed, Southern Baptist, and Presbyterian strands of evangelicalism.

Third, the combination of two sources of data (interviews and worship service observations) provided great insight as to how the leaders put their philosophy into their practice.

Fourth, the ability to use technology in interviews and in worship service observations proved to be a great strength. This study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time of extreme restriction. The research design overcame these restrictions, allowing for the viewing of church livestreams and video interviews. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, most church visits were virtual only. This restriction ultimately made this project much more accessible and more readily enabled data gathering from all over the United States. It also provided me the opportunity to ask worship leaders “What will I miss by not being in the room on Sunday?” (appendix 4). Some rich insights came from their answers to the question. Because of the pandemic and my geographic separation from interviewees, the use of video calls and the viewing of service livestreams were essential. There was little to no technological difficulty throughout the study.

Fifth, the one-hour time frame given for interviews, the preparatory information provided for the worship leaders, and the broad nature of the questions allowed time for each of the interviewees to elaborate. Beginning with open-ended demographic questions personalized the entire interview and gave the interviewee an opportunity to share whatever information he/she deemed important. Every leader interviewed was eager to participate, and it was evident in their answers to the initial questions that each one had given significant thought to the preparatory questions. Many responded to the initial demographic questions by moving immediately into aspects of their worship planning process, and these answers yielded additional insights.

A few of the questions had significant overlap, but with variances that nuanced the answers of the respondents. Question 3 of the preparatory questions sent ahead of time was “What do you want to see happen in the life of people who have attended a worship service at your church?” (appendix 4). Question 2 of the questions related to follow-up and life orientation, and one for which they were not able to prepare, was “What should your congregation take away from a worship set or service?” (appendix 4).

Preparatory question 3 encouraged the leaders to connect worship and discipleship in their answer, both by giving them time to prepare and by placing it with other questions that highlighted the connection. In contrast, follow-up and life orientation question 2 was not given in advance and came after a string of questions that focused on practical matters of weekly planning.

Sixth, the development of a matrix and a rubric as practical tools for worship leaders planning worship services is a significant strength. They should prove to be helpful applications of the study.

Weaknesses

The research design for this study manifested a few weaknesses. First, some of the experts were better positioned to offer recommendations than others. An inordinate number of exemplars came from the recommendations of two of the experts who were the most deeply involved in training worship leaders. All of the recommendations of these experts were still beneficial to the study and varied denominationally as well as in church liturgy. Still, a more even spread of recommendations from all of the experts would have been desirable.

Second, the study also lacked diversity. All but one exemplar interviewed were Caucasian, and all were serving primarily white churches. All but one of the exemplars were male. Out of the six experts, two were female, and only one was non-Caucasian. Additionally, this study left out many denominations for consideration.

Third, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, most church visits were virtual only. Though the restriction imposed by the pandemic ultimately proved to be a strength, undoubtedly, more could have been observed by being present in-person for each Sunday morning gathering. The one service that I was required to visit in-person allowed me to more fully observe and experience the church as well as to interact with congregation members.

Further Research

This study was not specific to one denomination but also left out many denominations and traditions and was limited to practitioners and congregations within the United States. Additional studies could focus on a particular denomination, different denominations or traditions than those represented here, or areas outside the U.S.

This project sought to ascertain how corporate worship practice was linked to spiritual growth from the perspective of those who plan and lead corporate worship gatherings. A complementary study could attempt to gather data from congregation members, measuring spiritual growth in those congregation members in connection to the Sunday worship gathering.

The development of the planning matrix and evaluative rubric was listed as a significant strength of this study. Utilizing the matrix and evaluative rubric, a worship planner should be able to plan a corporate worship gathering for growing Christian disciples. A study could be conducted that implements the matrix over time and measures its effectiveness.

Each leader I interviewed was concerned with his/her church members' becoming more deeply committed to Christ. Every church service I observed was planned and led with an encouragement for members to grow in Christ. Once church members of any of these congregations come into the assembly to worship, they are spurred on to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24): they are prompted to respond to the Word of God, drawn to the centrality of the person and work of Christ, and reminded of their membership with a body of brothers and sisters united in the Spirit. However, what has not been adequately accounted for is how congregation members are coming into the assembly. How have they been prepared to receive the service? The worship service may indeed be intentionally planned and then conducted as a step on the discipleship pathway, but congregation members must be prepared to engage it as such. I did not observe this

kind of preparation being done. Connections must be made between worship pastors and other leaders and between Sunday and the rest of the week.

Conclusion

The recognition of a strong convergence between biblical worship and Christian discipleship must impact the planning practices of diligent worship leaders so that their congregations progressively view the corporate gathering as a place of spiritual growth. There are certainly seeds being sown by pastors and worship planners who recognize the immense privilege of prompting their brother and sisters in Christ to worship. However, much yet remains to be done in order for church leaders to more practically and purposefully shape expectations for followers of Christ so that they are prepared to rightfully engage with God, who is the initiator of true worship. It is God who gathers us as his church. He speaks to us, reminding us of his great salvation, his continual presence, and his precious promises. He calls us to lives that declare his glory, and he sends us into the world commissioned and empowered. Darren expressed it simply: “I’m so surprised that we get to do this and so grateful to God that he doesn’t save us to be on our own, but he gives us all we need in himself and in his body and . . . just yeah, what a gift of grace that is—thanks be to God.”

APPENDIX 1

LETTER TO WORSHIP EXPERTS

Dear Participant,

I am reaching out to you to gauge whether you think you might be available to participate in my research. My thesis is “The Worship-Discipleship Nexus: Integrating Corporate Worship and a Discipleship Pathway.” The underlying hypothesis sees great lines of convergence between a biblical theology of worship and Christian discipleship. Corporate worship is formative for the believer: when we gather, we grow. So in the study I’m exploring (1) those essential elements of corporate worship practice that positively impact and inform the disciple-making process, (2) the necessary accompanying background or preparatory mindset that fosters and creates the expectation for spiritual growth through corporate worship, and (3) the result in the life of people who view and participate in corporate worship as an ongoing spiritually formative activity. In answering these questions, the ultimate aim is to create a matrix and rubric or evaluative tool for helping pastors and worship planners to structure corporate gatherings and to prepare their congregations to approach and engage worship services as steps on their discipleship pathway.

My study has confirmed a strong convergence between biblical worship and Christian discipleship; both are both whole-life responses to God’s revelation by redeemed people, in community. I am designating churches where these guiding principles can be observed in the practices of worship leaders and pastors as exemplar churches; that is, a robust theology of worship that shows itself in the worship planning practices of leaders and pastors. With this as a guiding framework, would you be willing to give me 1-3 recommendation of churches that, in your estimation, may fit this description of an exemplar church? I am delimiting this study to churches that characterize themselves as born-again Protestants who cherish the Bible as the Word of God and who emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

At each church I would then like to attend a worship service and interview the worship leader, planner or pastor.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your consideration, and for your ministry in Christ’s church,

Chad Vitarelli
Ed.D. Candidate

APPENDIX 2

INTRO LETTER TO EXEMPLAR CHURCHES

Dear Worship Leader/Planner/Pastor,

I am a student at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and am presently engaged in my final thesis project. As a worship pastor myself for the past 25 years, I have chosen to engage a study entitled “The Worship-Discipleship Nexus: Integrating Corporate Worship and a Discipleship Pathway.” The underlying hypothesis sees great lines of convergence between a biblical theology of worship and Christian discipleship. My hope is to observe the practices of churches where a robust theology of worship shows itself in the worship planning practices of leaders and pastors. From those observations, the ultimate aim is to create a matrix and rubric or evaluative tool for helping pastors and worship planners to structure corporate gatherings and to prepare their congregations to approach and engage worship services as steps on their discipleship pathway.

I enlisted six experts in the study and practice of Biblical worship to recommend churches like described above, and your church was recommended to me. I am delimiting this study to churches that characterize themselves as born-again Protestants who cherish the Bible as the Word of God and who emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

To participate in this project, I would like to interview you (either in-person or by video conference) regarding your planning practices and processes for preparing your congregation to worship, and attend a worship service either in-person or by livestream. The interview should take an hour or less. Thank you for considering this. If you have questions, please feel free to email me at cvitarelli271@students.sbts.edu.

I pray God’s blessing on your continued ministry in Christ’s church.

Chad Vitarelli
Ed.D. Candidate

APPENDIX 3

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Dear Participant,

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this study. I believe it will be beneficial to worship leaders, planners and pastors as they seek to make this important connection between the corporate worship gathering and the discipleship process. I am looking forward to our time together in the interview. Below is the informed consent statement and a few questions that I wanted to pass along in advance of our meeting together via phone or video conference.

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify practice elements of worship design that impact the discipleship process. This research is being conducted by Chad Vitarelli for purposes of aiding church worship leaders in crafting corporate gatherings with an intentional focus on the spiritual growth of members. [describe the reason for the research, such as project research or dissertation research]. In this research, you will be asked to respond to several questions regarding your own worship planning practices and experiences. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this interview, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate I do not agree to participate

Overview Questions:

- 1) How would you define *worship*, and what are your goals for corporate worship?
- 2) How would you define *discipleship*, and how would you summarize related goals?
- 3) What do you want to see happen in the life of people who have attended a worship service at your church?
- 4) What are some key characteristics of a mature believer at your church?

Other questions will be related to your planning process for worship gatherings, and are available if you would prefer to see them ahead of time.

Please let me know if you have any additional questions. Thank you again for your willingness to aid my research, and for your ministry in Christ's church.

Sincerely,

Chad Vitarelli
Ed.D. Candidate

APPENDIX 4
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic questions:

1. Describe your ministry context.
2. How many years have you been in ministry?
3. How many years have you served in your current role?
4. Age/church size?
5. Describe liturgy of your church?
6. How do you view your role at the church?

Preparatory Questions:

1. How would you define *worship*, and what are your goals for corporate worship?
2. How would you define *discipleship*, and how would you summarize related goals?
3. What do you want to see happen in the life of people who have attended a worship service at your church?
4. What are some key characteristics of a mature believer at your church?

Questions related to revelation and response:

1. How does the sermon text impact your planning?
2. What input does the senior pastor have in your planning? What role does he have in the worship service?
3. What service elements or forms do you utilize in planning (Scripture, readings, etc.)
4. Do you think in terms of “flow”? What does this term mean to you?
5. What are your criteria for song selection? What is a typical lifespan and criteria for lifespan of songs?

Questions related to redemption, the gospel:

1. How does your church interact with the content of the gospel on a Sunday morning?

Questions related to preparation and follow-up, life orientation:

1. What does your congregation know about the service prior to the service?
2. What should your congregation take away from a worship set or service?
3. What are the different ways you expect church members respond in the course of a worship service?

Questions related to community orientation:

1. What elements in your service help the church to become more conscious of one another?
2. If I will need to view the live-stream rather than attend in person, what will I miss by not being in the room on Sunday?
3. What surprises you in the worship service? What happens that you don't plan for?

APPENDIX 5
ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 1

Welcome

Call to Worship

Psalm 36:5-9

⁵Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.

⁶Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,
your justice like the great deep.

You, LORD, preserve both people and animals.

⁷How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

⁸They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.

⁹For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.

Graves into Gardens

Lake/Brown/Furtick/Hudson

Scripture Reading

Romans 3:10-12, 18

¹⁰as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹no one understands;
no one seeks for God. ¹²All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good, not even one.”

Prayer of Confession and Assurance

In Christ Alone

Getty/Townend

Missions Testimony

Elder Prayer

Sermon

“The Tongue”

Proverbs 18:21

Communion

Christ Our Hope in Life and Death

Getty/Papa

Doxology

Benediction

Numbers 6:24-26

²⁴ The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

APPENDIX 6

ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 2

REVELATION: God Makes Himself Known to Us

Silent Prayer and Meditation

Prelude

The Holy Trinity Williams

Christian Greeting

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Scripture Reading

Revelation 15:3-4

Reader: The Word of the Lord

People: Thanks be to God

ADORATION: Exalting our Glorious God

Holy, Holy, Holy

Responsive Prayer of Praise

Psalm 138

Leader: I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;

All: I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.

Leader: On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased.

All: All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth, and they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.

Leader: For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.

All: Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me.

Leader: The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me;

All: your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Amen.

Glory Be to the Father

CONFESSION: Lifting Contrite Hearts Up to the Lord

Scripture Reading: Job 38:4-11

God Be Merciful to Me

Silent Prayers of Repentance

Corporate Prayer of Confession

Gracious Father, Blessed Savior, Loving Spirit: Triune God, we confess to you our small-mindedness, our hard-heartedness, and our frequent denials of your presence.

Father, we confess that we scarcely consider your mighty movements in the events of history and in the course of our daily lives. Lord, we have sinned; forgive us and enlarge our understanding. Lord Jesus, we confess that your life and death and resurrection do not infuse our thinking as they should; we are so hemmed in by transitory interests and

temporal pursuits that we lose sight of the essential and eternal issues. Lord, we have sinned; forgive us, and deepen our love. Holy Spirit, we confess that we do not value, and often do not welcome the gift of your presence to liberate our tongues to praise you and our lives to serve you. Lord, we have sinned; forgive us and set us free. Heavenly Father, forgive us for our failures and our sins, through the love of our Lord Jesus, and help us to live by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

EXPIATION: God declaring forgiveness

Declaration of the Good News 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

Leader: In Christ your sins are forgiven you!

People: The Lord be praised!

Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven

PROCLAMATION: God speaking through His Word

Sermon “The Trinity Matters in Salvation, Sanctification and Worship”

DEDICATION: Responding to the Word of God

God Our Father We Adore Thee

Offertory Prayer

Offertory

“Christ Be With Me”

Williams

SUPPLICATION: Praying for the Church and the World

Intercessory Prayer

COMMISSION: God sending us forth to serve Him

Pastoral Welcome and Announcements

May the Grace of Christ Our Savior

Pastoral Charge and Benediction

Postlude

APPENDIX 7

ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 3

Welcome

Call to Worship

Psalm 95

¹Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

²Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! ³For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

⁴In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.

⁵The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

⁶Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

⁷For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, ⁹when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. ¹⁰For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.”

¹¹Therefore I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.”

All Creatures of Our God and King

Francis of Assisi/Sovereign Grace

O Great God

Bob Kauflin

Pastoral Prayer, adapted from Heidelberg Catechism

Scripture Reading

Ephesians 4:17-4:32

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Sermon

“Getting Our House in Order”

Ephesians 4:17-32

Reflective Prayer

The Lord’s Supper

Grace and Peace

Sczebel

Is He Worthy

Peterson/Shive

Be Thou My Vision

Ancient Irish ca.700/trans. Byrne

Announcements

Prayer of Benediction

APPENDIX 8
ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 4

Welcome

Call to Worship

Psalm 147:1, 3, 5-7

Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. ⁶The Lord lifts up the humble; he casts the wicked to the ground. ⁷Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre!

God the Uncreated One (King Forevermore)

Keyes/James

Pastoral Prayer

Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery

Boswell/Papa/Bleecker

Your Labor is Not in Vain

Wardell/Zach/Kimbrough

Scripture Reading

Ephesians 4:7

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Sermon

“A Good Benediction”

Ephesians 4:7

Prayer for Pastoral Family

Great is Thy Faithfulness

Chisholm/Runyan

Benediction

APPENDIX 9
ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 5

Welcome

Call to Worship

Psalm 46

¹⁰ “Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!”

¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Blessed Assurance

Crosby

Sermon preview and Opening Prayer

If Our God is For Us

Ferguson/Tealy/Reeves/Robinson/Farren/Tranter

Prayer and Offering

The Goodness of Jesus

Aghajanian/Druery/Farren/Maxwell/Robinson/Thompson

Sermon

“Divine Discipleship: Receiving Rest”

Matthew 11:28-30

Invitation

Announcements and Closing Prayer

APPENDIX 10

ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 6

Voluntary and Opening Sentences

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name

Perronet/Rippon/Holden

(Invitation to Kneel)

Confession of Sin

Almighty and most merciful Father; We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

The Declaration of Forgiveness

A Reading From the First Epistle of St. John (1:1-2:2)

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to

you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. 5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1:1-2:2)

Psalm 133, read responsively

Oh, how good and pleasant it is, * when brethren live together in unity! 2 It is like fine oil upon the head * that runs down upon the beard, 3 Upon the beard of Aaron, * and runs down upon the collar of his robe. 4 It is like the dew of Hermon * that falls upon the hills of Zion. 5 For there the Lord has ordained the blessing: * life for evermore.

A Reading from the Gospel according to St. John (20:19-31)

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Suffrages

Officiant: O Lord, show thy mercy upon us; People: And grant us thy salvation.

Officiant: Endue thy ministers with righteousness; People: And make thy chosen people joyful.

Officiant: Give peace, O Lord, in all the world; People: For only in thee can we live in safety.

Officiant: Lord, keep this nation under thy care; People: And guide us in the way of justice and truth.

Officiant: Let thy way be known upon earth; People: Thy saving health among all nations.

Officiant: Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

People: Nor the hope of the poor be taken away. Officiant: Create in us clean hearts, O God;

People: And sustain us with thy Holy Spirit.

Collect and Prayers of Intercession

The General Thanksgiving

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men. We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful; and that we may show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

The Grace and the Welcome

Presentation of Bibles for Second Graders

The Collect

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that, by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Speak O Lord

Getty/Townend

The Sermon

At the Offertory, Anthem

Glory, Glory in Immanuel's Land

Assad

The Doxology

The Closing Prayers and Blessing

O Praise the Name

Hastings/Ussher/Sampson

APPENDIX 11

ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 7

GATHERING (God unites us in His presence to remember the story of God)

Prelude

Graves into Gardens

Lake/Brown/Furtick/Hudson

Call to Worship

Sing to the Lord a new song:

All: He has done marvelous things!

Invocation

To God be the Glory

Crosby/Doane

Cornerstone

Mote/Lijero/Myrin/Morgan/Bradbury

How Firm a Foundation

Public Domain

Call for Offering

Pastoral Prayer

WORD (God speaks to us through His Word)

Scripture Presentation

Isaiah 32:1-4; Luke 24:28-35

Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice.

² Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a shelter from the storm, like streams of water in a dry place, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land. ³ Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed, and the ears of those who hear will give attention. ⁴ The heart of the hasty will understand and know, and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly.

Isaiah 32:1-4

²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24:28-35

The Word of the Lord

ALL: Thanks be to God!

Sermon

“Eyes Wide Open”

Isaiah 32:1-4; Luke 24:28-35

THANKSGIVING (We respond to God's Word in thanksgiving and fellowship)

Response to the Word

Center

Hall/Redman

SENDING God blesses us and sends us out to do His mission in the world

Benediction and Sending

APPENDIX 12

ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 8

Call to Worship

Psalm 25:4

Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. ⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

Prayer

Turn Your Eyes

Romanacce/Winebarger/Stiff/Trout

The Lord is My Salvation

Myrin/Getty/Nockels

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16

¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Before the Throne of God Above

Bancroft/Cook

Public Reading and Congregational Prayer

Revelation Song

Riddle

Prayer by Pastor

Fellowship

Sermon “Pure Gospel: The Affirmation of a New Reality” Romans 6:11-14

APPENDIX 13

ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 9

Call to Worship

Psalm 36:7-9

⁷ How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!

People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house;

you give them drink from your river of delights.

⁹ For with you is the fountain of life;

in your light we see light.

How Your Mercies Overflow

Carpenter/Arcieri

Sermon

“Forgiveness”

Matthew 18

Here is Love

Rees

Jesus There’s No One Like You

DeGraide/Kauflin

There is Peace

Carpenter

His Mercy is More

Boswell/Papa

Announcements

Benediction

Ephesians 2:8-10

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

APPENDIX 14

ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 10

Announcements

Near the Cross

Crosby

How Deep the Father's Love for Us

Getty

The Power of the Cross

Getty

Responsive Prayer

LEADER: Dear heavenly Father, we bow before you in humility and ask you to examine our hearts today. Reveal any secret pride, any unconfessed sin, any rebellion or unforgiveness that may be hindering our relationship with you.

PEOPLE: I thank you that I am your beloved child, having by faith accepted Christ's death as the payment for my sinfulness. The price Jesus paid covered me for all time, and my desire is to live for you.

LEADER: As we take the bread representing Christ's Life that was broken for us, we remember and celebrate your faithfulness in sending him. As we take the cup representing Christ's blood poured out for us, we realize He was the supreme sacrifice for all our sins.

PEOPLE: Thank you for your extravagant love and unmerited favor. Thank you that Christ' death gave me life – abundant life now and eternal life forever.

LEADER: Thank you for Christ's victory over death. He took the death that we all deserve. He took our punishment. Your Son's pain was indeed our gain.

PEOPLE: While my relationship with you is secure in Christ, I know sin can break our fellowship. I am still human, and I often forget who I am and whose I am. You want to convict and correct me, not shame me. You love me like a perfect parent.

ALL: You love us no matter what, but sin hurts our hearts and yours. So before we take communion today, we ask that the Holy Spirit search our hearts and reveal any hidden things for which to ask your forgiveness. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Lord Have Mercy

Merkel

Silent Prayer

Communion

It Was Finished Upon that Cross

Robinson/Hendroff/Thompson

Sermon

“The Death Christ Died”

Luke 23

APPENDIX 15

ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 11

Greeting:

Leader: Alleluia! Christ is risen! People: Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Leader: Grace be to you and peace from God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from Jesus Christ. He is a faithful witness, and the first to rise from the dead. He rules over the kings of the earth.

People: Glory and power belong to Jesus Christ who loves us! He has set us free from our sins by pouring out his blood for us. Glory and power belong to Jesus Christ for ever and ever! Amen.

Opening Hymn: *Great is Thy Faithfulness*

Leader: Lord, in the bright light of Easter morning, your grace shines. But the light of your grace also reveals our sin. It uncovers the broken secrets of our lives. Let us confess our sin and brokenness together. When we are like Peter and deny you before others:

People: Christ, have mercy on us. Leader: When we are like Judas and think money can buy happiness: People: Christ, have mercy on us. Leader: When we are like Pontius Pilate and wash our hands of responsibility: People: Christ, have mercy on us.

Confession and Assurance:

Leader: When we are like Thomas and don't believe the good news of Jesus' resurrection:

People: Christ, have mercy on us. Raise us from sin as you rose from death. Leader: Let us silently confess our sins to our merciful God.

(Silent prayer of confession: We remember our baptism by pouring the water into a bowl. You may pour water into a bowl in your own home along with the liturgist)

Leader: In baptism, God promises by grace alone to forgive our sins and resurrect us to eternal life.

Because of Jesus' resurrection, "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory of new life through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

Song: *Gloria* (Puerto Rico)

"Oh how good is Christ the Lord! On the cross he died for me. He has pardoned all my sin. Glory be to Jesus. Glory be to Jesus. Glory be to Jesus. In three days he rose again. Glory be to Jesus."

Peace:

Leader: God has given us peace through his son Jesus Christ. Let us pass the peace of Christ to one another.

Prayer for Illumination

Song: Be still and know that I am God, Be still and know that I am God, Be still and know that I am God.

Reading:

Leader: We light the Christ candle to remind us that Christ is with us as we hear the word of God.

You may light a Christ candle in your own home.

Leader: O Christ, after your resurrection you appeared to your disciples; you breathed on them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Breathe on us that we might receive your spirit to recognize you in the reading of your Word.

People: Amen.

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 23

Leader: 1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; 3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long. This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

New Testament Reading I John 3:16-24

Leader: 16 We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. 19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us. This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Sermon “The Heart of the Matter”

Hymn of Response

I will hide Your word inside my heart so that it may guide me. Like a shining light, let it burn so bright; I will follow You.

Come and pour Your grace into my heart so that it may fill me with the precious things that Your Spirit brings; I will follow You.

Intercessory Prayer

Affirmation of Faith

Leader: Let us together affirm the faith of the church at all times and in all places.

People: I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Table

Preparing the Table

Leader: Sisters and brothers in Christ, the gospel tells us that on the first day of the week, the same day on which our Lord rose from the dead, he appeared to the disciples in the place where they were gathered and was made known to them in the breaking of bread. Come, then, to the joyful feast of the Lord. Let us prepare the table with the offerings of our life and labor.

Offertory Hymn (Psalm 23) *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*

Prayer of Great Thanksgiving...

Leader: The Lord be with you. People: And also with you. Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord. Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is fitting for us to give thanks. It is right and fitting, our joy and our salvation, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to you, almighty, everlasting God, through Christ our Lord.

(To God the Father) Leader: Blessed are you, strong and faithful God, and worthy are you to receive our thanks and praise. You made the earth in all its goodness and abundance, and you created humankind in your image to care for it. When we turned away, you remained faithful, sending your only Son to overcome the power of sin and death by his glorious resurrection. Therefore, with the women at the tomb, the apostles in the upper room, and the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth, we sing with joy,

Song:

Holy, holy, holy , holy holy is the Lord.

Holy, holy, holy , holy holy is the Lord.

The angels fill the heavens with a song unto the Lord.

Creation lifts its voice up in a song of gratitude.

(...for the work of Jesus Christ)

Leader: Holy are you, most high and exalted above all forever. Holy also is your Son, Jesus Christ. He is the Word made flesh, the firstborn of all creation. By his life, death, and resurrection all things are made new and are reconciled to you. Remembering what

Christ endured for us, we give you thanks, almighty God, and together proclaim the mystery of our faith:

People: Kristo amekufa. Kristo amefufuka. Kristo atakuja tena. (Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.)

Leader: We give thanks to God that our Savior Jesus Christ, before he suffered, gave us this memorial of his sacrifice until his coming again. On the night of his arrest, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to God, and broke it, saying, "This is my body, given for you; do this to remember me."

People: The bread which we break, is our sharing in the body of Christ.

Leader: Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and offered it to them, saying, "This is the blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this to remember me."

People: The cup for which we give thanks is our sharing in the blood of Christ.

(...for the presence of the Holy Spirit)

Leader: O Lord, send your Spirit among us, that we and your entire church may be made whole and holy through this meal. May all who share the communion of the body and blood of our Savior Jesus Christ be united in him. And as this grain has been gathered from many fields into one loaf, and these grapes from many hills into one cup, grant, O Lord, that your church may soon be gathered from the ends of the earth into your royal house.

People: Come, Lord Jesus. Leader: And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we pray:

People: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

The Invitation to the Table

Leader: Congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord has prepared this table for all who love and trust in him for their salvation. Though we are scattered in body, we are united with Christ through his Spirit in this sacrament of his body and blood.” Anyone baptized in the name of the Triune God is now invited to come with gladness to this holy meal.

People: In thanks for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, in the joy of his resurrection, in the hope of his coming again, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices and come to the table of the Lord.

Leader: The gifts of God for the people of God.

Communion (Song: Psalm 116)

The Thanksgiving

Leader: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.

People: Worthy is the Lamb to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!

Benediction:

(Snuff the candle and watch the smoke curl in the air and spread throughout the room)

Leader: Now the Light of Christ that was just in one place at one time is in all places in all times.

May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make us perfect in all goodness so that we may do God's will through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

People: Amen.

APPENDIX 16

ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 12

Welcome

Family video greeting, invitation to worship

Death in His Grave

McMillan

Call to Worship

Today as we continue to celebrate the resurrection, we echo the good news: Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed! And as the apostle Paul says, so if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and Your life is hidden with Christ in God.

This Joyful Eastertide

Woodward

Call to Prayer

Again, Paul in Colossians 3 writes: so if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is. And he later says, put to death in you anything that is earthly.

Agnus Dei

Traditional/Helder

Spoken Prayer of Confession

Silent Prayer of Confession

Agnus Dei

Traditional/Helder

Words of Assurance

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen. Friends, hear this good news: we have died, and have been raised to new life with Christ. It is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us. We are a new creation. Believe this good news, and be at peace.

Song of Response

Death in His Grave

McMillan

Announcements

We Long to See You

Kimbrough

Sermon

“Seek the Things that are Above” Colossians 3:1-3

Communion

Awake O Sleeper

Rodriguez/Scottish trad.

Crown Him With Many Crowns

Bridge/Thring/Elvey

Benediction

Friends, you are about to enter every sector of public life to claim it for Christ. So as you do, may the grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen. Go in peace.

APPENDIX 17

ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 13

God So Loved

Call to Worship

Psalm 96:1-3, 7-9

LEADER: ¹ Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! ² Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. ³ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! ⁴ For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.

ALL TOGETHER: Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! ⁸ Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! ⁹ Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!

Prayer

Sovereign Over Us

Keyes/Brown/Mooring

Christ Our Hope in Life and Death

Papa/Getty/Boswell/Kauflin/Merker

Confession of Sin

from Philip Doddridge

PASTOR: Injured King and almighty Judge, all my thoughts and affections, my desires, my pursuits—everything has been alienated from you. I have acted as if I hated you—you who are infinitely the loveliest of all beings. As if I had been trying to wear out your

wonderful patience. My actions have been evil, my words yet more so. And my heart, how much more corrupt than either! What a fountain of sin and original corruption is my heart, provoking your patience more and more. If the offense were against me, I could not have endured it as you have. Had I been a prince, I would long since have done justice on any rebel whose crimes even faintly resembled mine.

Had I been a parent, I would have long since cast off such an ungrateful child. Why then, Lord, am I not cast out from your presence? Why am I not sealed up under an irreversible sentence of destruction! I owe my life to your indulgence.

ALL TOGETHER: Wound my heart, Lord, so you can afterward heal it. Break it in pieces, if you will bind it up in the end. In Christ's name, Amen.

Silent Prayer

Assurance of Pardon

Micah 7:18

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.

Offering

Sermon "The Unexpected and Uncomfortable Forgiveness of God" Acts 10:34-48

Amazing Love (You Are My King)

Foote

Doxology

Trad.

APPENDIX 18

ORDER OF SERVICE: CHURCH 14

Call to Worship

Nahum 1:7

The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.

Prayer

How Firm a Foundation

Scripture Reading

Romans 8:31-39

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;

we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Christ Our Hope in Life and Death

Papa/Getty/Boswell/Kauflin/Merker

Give Me Jesus

Lachance

Prayer Time

Ephesians 3:14-21

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Sermon

Matthew 6:5-18

Be Thou My Vision

Ancient Irish ca.700/trans. Byrne

Benediction

Hebrews 13:20-21

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

APPENDIX 19

MATRIX FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH THROUGH CORPORATE WORSHIP

Church Year					
Sermon Text					
Gospel Shape	Service Element	How	Who	Local	Larger
Adoration					
Confession					
Assurance					
Thanksgiving					
Instruction					
Communion					
Commission					

Notes: Church Year = Time in the liturgical calendar; Sermon Text = morning's sermon text and current series; Gospel Shape = elements of historical liturgy and contour of the gospel; Service Element = order of service and elements; How = leader's intention in prompting the congregation to understand and connecting to other service elements; Who = specific leadership of service element; Local = service elements that prompt consciousness of other body members; Larger = service elements that prompt consciousness of a larger community.

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ABSTRACT

THE WORSHIP-DISCIPLESHIP NEXUS: INTEGRATING WORSHIP PRACTICE AND A DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

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The intent of this study is to learn from exemplar church leaders who recognize significant convergence between the biblical aims of corporate worship and Christian discipleship. By observing the planning practices of these leaders, my desire is to ascertain practical aspects of worship design that positively impact and inform the disciple-making process. In chapter 2, four relevant areas of literature are reviewed. The first is work in biblical theology of corporate worship. The second involves biblical theology of Christian discipleship. Significant scholarship exists for each of these areas, and there are key points of convergence between the two. The third includes literature regarding the function of liturgy in corporate worship throughout church history for purposes and goals related to Christian discipleship. The fourth involves any precedent studies of the intersection of these larger categories.

Chapter 3 articulates the methodology. The first phase of research is the enlistment of experts for recommendations of exemplar churches. The second phase involves interviews with worship leaders, planners, and pastors who have been recommended by the experts as well as observations of the exemplar churches' worship services. Chapter 4 displays the content of the interviews and observations from the worship services. Chapter 5 combines data from interviews and worship service analyses to be displayed in two ways: (1) a matrix showing how worship service elements are connected to one another and serve larger goals and (2) a rubric outlining some key

principles to consider as well as guiding questions to ask when planning a worship service with these goals in mind.

Key words: corporate worship, discipleship, liturgy, worship planning, pastoral leadership

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