

A Philosophy of Worship

Principles that will guide us in our corporate Lord's Day worship gatherings.

1. **Prayerful preparation.** We invite everyone who participates in our corporate services to prayerfully prepare for their particular role, including but not limited to those who teach, greet, select songs, read Scripture, make announcements, pray, or preach. We will each aim to seek the face of the Lord through prayer—well in advance of the time of the gathering—in order to be led by His Spirit in preparing for the role and in order to execute our role “in the strength that God supplies, so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 4:11). In so far as time allows, we will strive for all participants to pray together before the start of the gathering.
2. **Christ-centered conduct.** We will aim to keep the glory of God through Jesus Christ before us in all that we do. We will avoid anything that might draw attention away from Christ and to ourselves. We will think carefully about our words, wardrobe, and music while striving to let “whatever we do be done to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).
3. **Whole-hearted worship.** Jesus taught us that the greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength” (Luke 10:27). We understand this to mean that we are to love God with our whole being both inwardly and outwardly, with our bodies and our minds, with the affections of our hearts, as well as the use of our hands. Thus, there will be times in our corporate services when we may kneel,¹ stand,² be silent,³ sing,⁴ shout with joy,⁵ weep,⁶ or lift our hands.⁷ All of these expressions of worship are acceptable and welcomed so long as they do not create confusion⁸ and are aimed at ascribing glory to God rather than drawing attention to one's self. Regarding the miraculous gifts such as tongues, interpretation, word of knowledge, etc., while the elders of Hope are not cessationists,⁹ we have discovered that the expression of such gifts in the context of a corporate worship setting has the potential to lead to more confusion than clarity, thus our custom will be to refrain from the spontaneous expression of such gifts until or unless they can first be prayerfully discerned by at least two elders present at the time.

¹ Nehemiah 8:6; Matthew 8:2; Acts 20:36.

² Acts 2:14; Rev. 7:9-10.

³ 1 Samuel 1:12-13.

⁴ Exodus 15:1, 21; Psalm 5:11; 7:17; 9:2, 11; 18:49; 30:4; 33:3; 47:6; 66:4; 67:4; 92:1; 96:1; 104:33; Matt. 26:30; Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; Heb. 2:12; James 5:13.

⁵ Psalm 32:7; 33:3; 42:4; 126:5-6; Ezra 3:13; Mark 11:9.

⁶ Ezra 3:12-13; Joel 2:12; Luke 6:21; Acts 20:37; Romans 12:15; James 4:9; 5:1.

⁷ Nehemiah 8:6; Psalm 28:2; 63:4; 119:48; 134:2; 141:2; Lamentations 3:41; Luke 24:50; 1 Timothy 2:8.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 14:33.

⁹ Our position is best described as “open but cautious.” For information on the different views of the manifestation of spiritual gifts, see *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* ed. Wayne Grudem, Richard Gaffin Jr., Robert Saucy, Sam Storms, Douglas Oss (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

4. **Biblical preaching and teaching.** In our handling of Holy Scripture, we will aim for expository, theologically-accurate, biblically-grounded, mind-engaging, heart-enflaming, and hand-enacting preaching and teaching. As we consider the amount of time given to sermons, we will strive to respectfully hold a balance between not being enslaved to the clock and yet not failing to make good use of time.¹⁰
5. **Disciple-driven.** The primary purpose of Christian worship services is for the disciples of Christ to gather together to worship Jesus. Thus, the highest goal of our worship services will be aimed at exalting Jesus, followed by edifying his disciples. While we yearn for unbelievers to attend our services, feel welcome among us, and to see the glory of Jesus, our guiding aim will be for the edification of the faith of believers. Since baptism marks the beginning of Christian discipleship, as often as is necessary we will include baptism as a joyful component of our services. Since the Lord's Supper is an expression of continuing communion with Christ and other believers,¹¹ we will sit together at the Lord's Table on the first Sunday of each month.¹²
6. **Musically contemporary.** In our worship in song, we will aim primarily to express our adoration of the Lord through songs that are more contemporary than traditional. The term "contemporary" by definition is a moving target because songs that were "contemporary" 200 or even 20 years ago are no longer so today. Thus, we will often be learning new songs and finding fresh expressions of our praise to God. While we will not ignore the hymns of the ages that have brought great blessing to God's church, our dominant leaning will be towards songs that are more new than old. God in his word commands us to "sing a new song,"¹³ while at the same time inviting us to sing "songs, hymns, and spiritual songs."¹⁴ We will strive to value both the old and new. However, the musical language by which we will express that value will sound more present than past. Our aim in forming a worship team and finding worship leaders will be to first find those committed to Christ from inside rather than from outside our congregation, who are willing and able to lead, have musical skill, and vocal ability. Since we are an ethnically and demographically diverse people, we would expect that diversity to be reflected in the team composition, musical style, and instrumentation with which God may choose to bless us. Since our deepest desire is the glorification of God, we will prioritize being Spirit-led and Spirit-filled above only being talent-led and skill-driven. Ideally, we would find Spirit-led, talented, and skilled team members who are servant-minded, humble-hearted, and open-handed lead worshipers of Jesus.

¹⁰ Ephesians 5:16.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

¹² We practice an "open" communion, which means that all professing believers, whether covenant members of the church or not, are welcome to participate, while those who are not yet professing believers should refrain from participation. Unbaptized children of believers should also refrain from participation until they are of age where they can understand the gospel and choose to profess their faith in Jesus, which should be followed soon thereafter by baptism.

¹³ Psalm 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isaiah 42:10.

¹⁴ Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.

7. **Family oriented.** We value the presence of children among us as we worship the Lord together. It is good for children to see and hear their parents and other adults singing praises to Jesus. We also value children being taught the word of God in ways appropriate to their age. Thus, children will remain with the larger congregation during worship in song and then will be dismissed before the sermon begins for age-appropriate teaching.
8. **Public reading of Scripture.** Paul commands the young pastor, Timothy, to be “devoted to the public reading of Scripture” (1 Tim. 4:13). Thus, included in our services will be regular times dedicated to the reading of Scripture, most often corresponding to the passage to be expounded, immediately preceding the preaching of the Word.
9. **Joyfully expectant.** We want more than anything to enter together into the presence of our great God and Savior as we worship him. Therefore, we invite all participants to expectantly come into our worship services, praying for the glory and presence of God to be manifested among us and to fill us with great joy. There is fullness of joy in God’s presence alone.¹⁵ Therefore, we invite you to come expecting God himself to be among us and satisfy our souls with the great joy of his sweet presence.

¹⁵ Psalm 16:11; 21:6; 95:2; Jude 1:24.