



LITURGY, MUSIC & SPACE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This curriculum is the result of the many books, articles, and experiences that have formed my understanding of Christian worship. I hope that this project, which introduces a wide range of issues related to worship, will encourage a deeper exploration of these topics. You can find source materials in the “For Further Study” section on page 49 of this study.

I would especially like to acknowledge the following. Chapters 1 and 7 were co-written with Rev. Greg Thompson in Charlottesville, Virginia. Chapter 3 is derived from a lecture given by Dr. John Witvliet, the director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I am indebted to that Institute for the content of chapter 6, which is a summary of its “vertical habits” project. (For more information about this concept, visit www.calvin.com/worship.) Chapter 10 is a summary of concepts set forth by John Witvliet as well as Nicholas Wolterstorff at the Institute. In chapter 2, the image of worship as banquet hall rather than lecture hall has its source in a sermon by Rev. Bill Boyd in 2008 in St. Louis, Missouri. Throughout chapters 4-6, I have drawn heavily on the theology of liturgy presented by James K. A. Smith in his book *Desiring The Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Much of chapter 7 originates from the teachings of Dr. John Hodges, the Director of the Center for Western Studies in Memphis, Tennessee. In chapter 9, the use of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as an illustration of the life of faith in a particular culture is an idea recently expounded on by David Dark in a series of 2007 lectures in Nashville, Tennessee. Lastly, chapter 12 draws extensively from the lifelong teachings of Fr. Bruce Morrill at Boston University. Additionally, all that follows owes much to the writings of Alexander Schmemmann, Tim Keller, Eugene Peterson, Ken Myers, James Davison Hunter, and Bryan Chapell, all of whom have shaped my understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the late modern world.

I would like to thank Laura Merricks, the editor for this project, for her countless hours of sculpting this content into a curriculum. Calvin Brondyke has also been instrumental in this process. Additional thanks to Dr. Trenton Merricks, Dr. Mike Farley, Hilary Swinson, Paul Nedelisky, Kris Livingston, Lee Livingston, Debby Prum, Trish Owen, and Wallace White for their editorial contributions.

Finally, this curriculum was made possible through a worship renewal grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, Michigan with funds provided by the Lilly Endowment Inc.

I’d especially like to thank my wife, Megan, for the many hours of editing and talking through these lessons. Her wisdom and insight have been invaluable to the writing of this curriculum.



INTRODUCTION

Our culture has seen many changes in the past fifty years, and those changes have affected worship in all of our churches. In my fifteen years of work in church worship, I have watched churches try hard to be faithful to God and to their neighbor with their worship in the midst of these changes, but many have struggled under the weight of strife over this issue. Often churches form segregated worship services using distinctions such as “traditional” and “contemporary,” but this solution has done little to lift the burden. The result is often individuals and families worshipping only with others who share their aesthetic vision, or even entire churches filled exclusively with a single demographic.

Because of this widespread struggle, there are many resources available to churches seeking a more biblical understanding of worship: academic studies, practical guides, and worship-planning manuals. This curriculum is none of those. While those resources are valuable for individual study and planning good worship services, the information and skills gleaned from them are not enough to shepherd congregations to health in the area of worship; that requires helping our congregations love each other in our differences. So the purpose of this curriculum is to help groups of Christian brothers and sisters learn healthy corporate worship, which the Scriptures say involves not only our love for God, but also our love for each other. It does this by teaching new ways of understanding biblical categories of worship and by offering new vocabulary to help congregations describe their experiences to each other. It is my hope that this 13-week study will help churches and small groups of all kinds to learn one another’s stories and to find healing and reconciliation through the Holy Spirit’s work.

This curriculum is in no way exhaustive in any of its categories. Instead, it is meant to function as a survey of the topics since many participants will be introduced to these theological concepts for the first time. I encourage all who use this resource to spend time each week in corporate prayer, asking God to be merciful, to grant understanding where there is distrust, and to grant wisdom where there is hurt. This has been our prayer in our own congregation as we have walked through this course together with individuals from all kinds of cultural backgrounds, with all kinds of assumptions and expectations for worship. May God bless your study and continue His work of building us together into a temple, holy and blameless in his sight.



READ THIS FIRST

While this curriculum may be used for individual study, its purpose is for use in a group setting – small groups, Sunday school classes, or any group gathering. The goal of this study is to provide an opportunity for groups to talk about their church’s worship, not to give individuals information about worship. Each chapter has the following components:

Exercise

This is an interactive activity to help prepare you for the discussion of the chapter.

Discussion

The topic for each week is covered in the main body or discussion of the chapter. It includes possible questions for you to discuss during the small group or Sunday school time. Illustrations of many of the points are included for your use or to give you ideas for illustrations of your own.

Lesson

Each chapter includes a summary of the lesson to be learned in that chapter along with a place for participants to write down obstacles that might stand in the way of applying the lesson.

Handout

Each chapter ends with a page called the Handout that can be copied and given to members of the group to take home (you might even consider using a different color of paper for clarity). It includes the Exercise for the chapter, the questions from the Discussion section, and the Lesson for the day with scripture reference.

For a small group or Sunday school class where the format is group discussion, we encourage you to print out copies of the Discussion for all participants to read ahead of time. Print and distribute copies of the Handout when you meet. Do the Exercise as a group to open. Discuss the chapter using the Discussion Questions. Finally, go over the Lesson together and write down obstacles to applying this lesson.

Or you may teach the class by reading the Discussion on your own, listening to Isaac’s lecture, and then teaching the information to the class. Print out and distribute the Handout in order to guide the group through the Exercise at the beginning of class and the Lesson at the end. Feel free to use the Discussion Questions to guide further conversation.

For the leader: We have structured this study so it begins and ends with participants interacting with each other about the material. We believe that Christian growth is not only cognitive, but also relational. This relational growth happens when we love one another through hearing each other, submitting to each other, and listening to and celebrating each other’s stories. So we begin with a group activity, then have a discussion, and finish each chapter by asking the question together: What are the obstacles to our applying these truths to our church’s worship? Try to allow at least 10 minutes to discuss this question. Each chapter ends with a prayer you may use to close your time together. (All prayers adapted from the *Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*, Arthur G. Bennett, author, editor.)