



# Planning and Leading a Worship Service

*by Pastor Steve*

There are no concrete rules when it comes to selecting a set of songs for a worship service. Many factors can determine what songs are sung and the order in which they are sung. One such factor is the amount of experience and skill level of the worship leader and band members. The style of music and the order of worship are usually determined by the pastor or other church leadership.

There are many different scenarios each of which must be considered when selecting songs for worship. It would be almost impossible to cover all of them in this article. The scenario I want to address here consists of a contemporary worship service with a worship leader and band. Let me stress that what I share is simply a suggestion or at best a good place to start. By no means is it a final authority. The Holy Spirit is the final authority. Only he fully knows the mind of the Father. He is the worship leader, and in the end what he wants sung is what counts.

For those who are just beginning to lead worship my best advice is to keep it simple. Don't try to be too spontaneous or play songs that are outside of your skill range. You need to assess the talent of your band members and select songs that are in their skill range as well. By staying within your capabilities your band will sound better and it will cut down on the frustrations of trying to learn harder music. You can build up to the more complex stuff as your band matures and you get more comfortable leading. By complex I mean style or arrangement; the number of chord changes and rhythm patterns. If there is a complex song that you really want to use try to find a way to simplify it. You don't have to play every song exactly the way it is recorded. Let's face it, not all of us are professional musicians and neither are our band members. Don't be ashamed of where you are, but don't stay there forever. Do what you do well and begin stretching yourself to the next level.

In putting together a song list I have found it helpful to choose songs that flow well together. I like to use songs that are in the same key or that easily modulate to another key. For instance; if I want to flow from one fast song to another without stopping I might use two songs that are written in the same key and that have very similar rhythms. If I want to change keys I might use a song written in the key of G and modulate to the key of A or A flat. Modulating a step or a half step up usually makes for the best transition.

Most of the time beginning a worship set with up beat songs followed by slower songs is best. Celebration or praise seems to pave the way into the more intimate times of worship. Much of the time the faster songs speak about God (praise); the slower songs speak to God (worship).

The number of up beat songs you do depends on how much time you have set aside for worship and the vision of the church leadership. It also depends on the setting of the meeting whether it is a Sunday celebration, special worship night or a home group meeting. Though beginning with up beat songs is a general rule it isn't written in stone. I have led worship many times and felt the Holy Spirit nudging me to begin with intimacy. Many times the celebration would come after an eventful time of worship and ministry.

Moving from fast songs to slow songs you might use a transition song. This would be a song that is somewhere in between slow and fast. A good "call to worship" song is appropriate here. You might consider choosing a song that makes an easy transition into the slow song portion of your set.

In choosing slow songs I generally use the same rule as choosing fast songs. Once you begin singing songs to God don't go back to singing about God. Continue to communicate to and with the Father. Sometimes it is appropriate to choose songs that have the same theme such as love or the cross. The pastor might suggest songs that convey what he feels the Holy Spirit is saying to your particular congregation.

Song selection should come during times of personal prayer and worship as well. It is a good idea to prepare more songs than you think you will use. This will give you some room for flexibility, sensitivity and spontaneity. Spontaneity is best when it is under girded with thorough preparation. Sometimes just playing instrumental music during the set lends itself to a great time of worship. Other times complete silence is in order.

Personally, I do little or no talking between songs when I lead worship. Singing several songs with no interruption lends itself to a more meaningful time of worship. The congregation didn't come to hear us talk. We don't want to distract them from their time with the Father. There are times, however, when a word of prophecy or a prayer is appropriate. Always be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. When speaking stay away from cheerleading and/or scolding the people. I don't believe rebukes are in line during worship. In the middle of an intimate time with your spouse you wouldn't want to hear them say, "Honey you burned the pancakes this

morning" or "Darling you forgot to take out the garbage." There are times for correction and rebuke but not during love making.

The appropriate way to end a worship set is always the hardest for me to discern; mainly because I never want to stop. Since there is no set rule, submitting to church leadership and others we trust gives guidance in times of uncertainty.

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