

The Studio

EPISODE // GIVING A WELCOME

One of the most important aspects the worship leader should consider at the opening of a worship gathering is how to begin well by offering a good welcome. The welcome sets the tone for the entire worship service, and really gives the congregation a glimpse of what the rest of the service will hold.

Without a strong welcome at the beginning of a service, the congregation can begin to feel lost, forgetting why it is we've all gathered in the first place. It is up to us, the worship leaders, to remind the congregation that we are the people of God, and that we have been welcomed into God's family because Christ calls us his friends. We create a welcoming space so that others can meet God in us, and what better way to do that than by formally welcoming them into the service right from the start.

We often spend a lot of time on the other aspects of a worship service, such as the music, or the sermon, or the lights, and neglect to really invest time in perfecting our welcoming words. It is important to remember how crucial the welcome is in bringing together the entire service.

Let me give you a few steps that may help you in planning your welcome.

- ✧ **Be engaging.** The welcome is generally at the beginning of a service, so you may be the first one your congregation hears from. If you bring them in with energy and hospitable body language, it will encourage worshipers to join with you in worship. The more engaging you are, the more they will be able to center their hearts and minds on God.
- ✧ **Know your congregation.** It is important to remember your audience. Who are you speaking to? A good welcome remembers both longtime church members and newcomers, group "insiders" and those who may feel like strangers to God's grace. It is essential that the words you use serve to welcome all.
- ✧ **Know your worship order.** Keep in mind what comes before and after the welcome in your order of worship when crafting it. Will you lead the congregation to turn and greet one another after you are done speaking, or will you invite them to stand and sing with the worship team? Know the structure of your worship service, and how your welcome is to fit within that structure. How the welcome fits into that overarching structure will affect how it is received by worshipers.
- ✧ **Establish the purpose of the worship gathering.** Consider both general and specific themes in worship for the day. More generally, we have gathered to encounter God and respond in faith. We have also come to be nourished as the church, the body of Christ. More specific themes can be drawn from the Scripture reading and sermon of the day. Try to bring in a story or a connection that ties into the lesson of the sermon, and use that to introduce the congregation to the purpose of the day.
- ✧ **Remember you are a guide in worship.** You know where the service is going, and as a leader, you can bring the congregation along in that journey. Often a physical gesture, intentional facial expressions, and a clear and confident tone can enhance your leadership. You may even invite them to participate. It can be meaningful for worshipers to respond with "Amen!" or "Thanks be to God!"
- ✧ **Write down your welcome.** I would strongly encourage you to write down your welcome before the time of the service. Talk it over with your minister; ask if there is anything specific that should be added to or referenced in the welcome. Make sure that you are preparing the congregation to offer their whole selves to God in worship.

Worship's welcome. It might seem minor, but it's an important part of gathering God's people, worshipers who come from different locations and experiences, and inviting all to encounter God together. These are just a few tips to keep in mind when planning your welcome.