

## *The Studio*

# EPISODE // IN BETWEEN WORDS

Have you ever spoken something in worship that you wish you could take back? One time I led worship outdoors. With the beauty of nature around us, we worshiped Christ as Creator and Redeemer. As we came to the end of our time together, I said, “Go out into this day enjoying God’s creation, *especially* Jesus Christ the Son.” Everyone began walking away, but I stood still. Did I just say...? “Wait up everyone! I just sent you into this day with *heresy!* Jesus is *the* Creator. He is not a part of creation! Enjoy God’s creation *and* Jesus Christ the Son.”

It’s amazing how one small word can communicate something so completely unintended. This just goes to show how powerful our words in worship can be. They can create understanding or cultivate confusion. They can inspire or frustrate. They can make a visitor in worship feel welcome or unwelcome. This is why it is so important that we spend time *considering* the words we speak in worship, especially those “in-between words.”

“In-between words” are those little words and phrases in worship that welcome members and guests. They introduce songs and prepare us for prayer. Most of the time in worship is taken up with scripture readings, sermons, and songs. But it is often what happens in between them that makes all the difference for encouraging full participation in worship.

So how can we prepare "in-between words" that help empower our worship?

### **Discerning Questions**

Begin by asking a few discerning questions.



#### **Does my transition link two acts of worship, showing how they are related?**

For example, imagine that you want to connect a moment of praise to a time of confession. You could say, "We praise a holy and righteous God. But we know that our praise is often half-hearted. Let's pray to our merciful God and confess the idols in our life that compete for our whole-hearted devotion."



#### **Does my transition teach but avoid being preachy?**

Maybe you want to help the community understand what it means to dedicate ourselves to God. Your spoken introduction to a song of dedication could go like this, "In dedication we offer our hands, hearts, and minds to Christ’s work in the world. Let's offer our whole-selves to God by singing “Take My Life and Let It Be.”



#### **Is my tone of voice warm and inviting?**

During a time of confession, for example, you want your voice to communicate the grace and mercy of God. You might say, "In our confession we sang, 'Create in me a clean heart.' In Ezekiel 36, God reminds us of this gracious promise, “I will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them...”n a planned and structured framework where elements fit together and make sense.

 **Are there especially poignant lines in a song or hymn that I could highlight in my introduction?**

One example would be, "We have gathered early on this morning to lift up our voices to our holy, triune God. With reverence and awe let's begin by singing, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, *early in the morning* our song shall rise to thee.'"

**Getting Started**

If you're just starting out in speaking "in-between words," it's helpful to write out your words ahead of time—even if you don't refer to your notes in the service. Writing out transitions provides you an opportunity to grow in vocabulary. It allows you to practice new ways to phrase familiar truth and develop powerful images.

Even those who speak extemporaneously often do better if they've worked out a written version ahead of time. Just like in jazz, good improvisation is practiced. In advance, nail down the key words, phrases and images, and then practice speaking out loud your words multiple times, in different ways. Then, in the moment of worship you'll be able to share the wealth of your ideas.

Also, a good exercise is to record yourself and critique your tone and pacing. Ask, "Am I warm and inviting? Am I joyful when introducing praise? Am I reverent when introducing confession?" Then ask a trusted friend or family member the same questions. Listening to yourself and receiving helpful criticism can dramatically improve your "in-between words" and the congregation's appreciation of your leadership.

**Conclusion**

When speaking "in-between words" it's important to remember that the sermon, songs, scripture readings, and prayers are the focal points in our worship services. Our "in-between words" are not the focus (which often happens when say something we wish we didn't say!). Our words are meant to help the congregation participate more fully in each worship element.