

The Studio

EPISODE // PLANNING WORSHIP

Worship takes us on a journey. It moves us from one place to the next. And, at the end of our traveling, we hope that we are changed - transformed - because we've encountered God and God's people, and we've been challenged to live lives that count - that make a difference in the world. In other words, we hope to leave worship different than when we came.

The problem is, that too often worship doesn't make a difference in people's lives. Sometimes, due to poor planning, worship becomes a routine that barely changes from week to week. While there's something to be said for familiarity, worship planning isn't some form of plug and play - keeping the same order week after week but changing a song here, a prayer there, and hearing a new sermon. While some people get stuck in a rut of planning and doing the same thing over and over, others plan weeks in advance. They work hard to be the hippest, the coolest, and the most relevant they can be in worship. They might get a reward for creativity and innovation, but in the end, that worship isn't authentic. It's not genuine. It's nothing more than a gimmick that has very little to do with Christ and the work of God in the world.

So, how do we avoid these extremes? How do we prepare for worship so that it becomes more than a dull, familiar ritual we participate in from week to week? How do we avoid silly gimmicks and marketing ploys because we think they'll get people in the door? These questions can't be answered easily. But, if you're willing to put in some thought and time and energy, you are capable of planning worship gatherings that are creative and relevant, genuine and authentic, and most importantly, grounded in scripture and the good news that Jesus Christ is still about the business of saving and restoring this broken world that we all live in. Here are some steps that might be a helpful starting place.

- ✦ **Plan worship with other people.** This might be a friend, another worship leader, a minister, or someone else. The old saying is that "two brains are better than one," and that definitely applies in worship planning! If you plan with others, you'll have more ideas, and you'll have more people invested in worship from the start.
- ✦ **Decide on the theme and the topic of your worship gathering.** Most of the time, this is will be a scripture passage, a core tenet of the Christian faith, or the topic of the sermon. Determine the focus, and become acquainted with it. If it is a scripture passage, read it over and over. Identify its primary theme and pay attention to supporting themes. Think about what that scripture passage means to you personally. Consider what it might mean to the church. Decide where it fits in the Gospel story.
- ✦ **Spend time brainstorming.** Think about all the possibilities that might work with the theme and topic of your worship gathering. In the end you won't use everything you brainstorm, but you'll have a wide range of things to choose from when you order your worship gathering. You might consider brainstorming through items such as the worship space, prayers you might use, artwork that might visually represent the theme, songs that fit the theme, and ways you might creatively read or present the scripture passage in worship.
- ✦ **Order the worship gathering.** Worship happens in time. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end, so when you think about how to order worship, you have to think about the sequence in which things will happen. In other words, how will you get from point A to point B to point C and so on?

The sequence should be clear to you, and it should be clear to the congregation as they move through the actions of worship.

- ✦ **Let your plan sit for a day or so.** Then, return to it. Think through the whole thing again. Make changes you decide are necessary. Time it, then begin gathering the tools and resources you will need to implement it.

Worship - like any good trip or journey - doesn't just happen. It requires a lot of thought and preparation. It takes creativity and imagination. It takes time, and it takes energy. But the good news is, if you're willing to put in thought and time and energy and creativity and imagination on the front end, you're going to be better equipped to lead the journey when the congregation gathers. And, you're going to have a better chance of taking more people with you on the worship journey so that they, too, might be changed - transformed - because they've encountered God and God's people, and they've been challenged to live lives that count - that make a difference in the world.