



nelson searcy
and jason hatley

WITH JENNIFER DYKES HENSON

engage

A GUIDE TO CREATING
LIFE-TRANSFORMING WORSHIP SERVICES

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preface

S*unday, 1:07 p.m.* Pastor Tim walks into his office, unbuttoning the top button of his shirt. He sets his Bible and notes on his desk, sinks into his chair, and says a quick thank-you to God for two great Sunday services. Tim hears a knock on his door and looks up to see Scott, the worship pastor, poking his head into the office.

“Just wanted to touch base before heading out,” Scott says.

“Hey, Scott. Absolutely. Come on in.” As Scott crosses to the other chair, Tim continues, “I think the worship went really well today.”

“Yeah, thanks. It came together,” says Scott, settling into the chair with a sigh. “The message was powerful too.”

“Well, thank you too,” Tim says lightly. “God was definitely moving.”

“Definitely. What does your afternoon look like?” Scott asks.

“Lunch with the family and some friends who are in from out of town. Then I’m heading home for a long Sunday afternoon nap. You?”

“I’m going to get some rest too, but I need to start pulling a few things together for next week,” Scott says.

“Yep, next Sunday will be here before we know it,” Tim says.

“Sure will. And we’ll do it all again,” Scott answers. After a few silent moments, Scott says, “Well, I will see you in the office tomorrow morning.”

“Sounds good, Scott. Enjoy your afternoon. See you tomorrow.”

There’s a fine line between Sunday afternoon and Monday morning. If you’ve been a teaching or worship pastor long, you know exactly what I mean. You spend all week planning, preparing, and praying for your Sunday services, and then, when they’re over, you barely have a minute to breathe before it’s time to start planning, preparing, and praying for the next week’s services.

Sunday comes along with amazing regularity. Each time it gets here, you are expected to have biblical yet original material prepared for your attenders—something that will resonate with them and send them back into the world better than when they walked through your doors. You can’t preach the same message you preached the week before; you can’t sing the same songs; you can’t show the same video clip or have the same guy give his testimony. The people sitting in front of you will be hungry for something fresh and new.

With this pressure on your shoulders, it’s easy to fall into the trap of a Sunday-to-Sunday mentality—that is, to feel like you are just trying to get through the next Sunday, then the next

Sunday after that, then the next Sunday after that . . . constantly behind the eight ball and making it up as you go every week. Can you relate?

Here's some good news: you don't have to live and die by the weekly grind. You can break the week-to-week mentality that sabotages so many well-intentioned teaching and worship pastors. By putting a strong, biblically sound worship planning system in place, you will be able to maximize not only this Sunday but every single "next Sunday" to come. The key to getting out of the tailspin and cooperating with God to do church at a higher level can be summed up in one word: planning.

My prayer is that the principles and ideas contained within these pages will help you shake free from the stress of under-the-gun worship planning and discover the peace (not to mention the fruit!) that comes when you put a solid worship planning system to work in your church.

Let's get started—if you're not too tired!

introduction

engage [in-’gāj]: to attract and hold by influence or power : to interlock with : to cause to mesh.

Merriam-Webster

And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

Hebrews 10:25

The first church I pastored was a small Baptist church in Charlotte, North Carolina. I was a twenty-one-year-old kid. The night they voted to call me as pastor, a whopping fifteen people were in attendance. Later I learned the plan that night had been either to vote me in or to vote to merge with the church down the street. They went with me, but I’m still not sure they made the right decision. Fortunately, God began to bless that little church and it started to grow. After a few long,

hard seasons, we were averaging almost one hundred people per week. Since attendance was so “high” every Sunday, I went to the deacon board with a proposal: we needed to hire a part-time minister of music. They reluctantly agreed.

After a few interesting interviews, I found a woman who fit the bill perfectly. Her name was Laura. Laura was an incredible singer, and her husband played the piano to boot—I got a two-for-one deal! Now, with the three of us on the platform, God began blessing our church even more. But things were far from perfect. The system I’m going to detail for you in the pages ahead had not yet formed in my mind, as was obvious by the ups and downs Laura and I struggled through. Here’s what I mean:

Sunday morning would roll around, and Laura and I would both show up at church. Some Sundays the music would be focused on God’s love, but my message would be an examination of God’s wrath. Laura and I would meet at the altar after the service and shake our heads in frustration. Some Sundays we’d get to church and the music would be all about God’s wrath (yes, there are a few in the Baptist hymnal), but my sermon would be on the sweetness of God’s love. Once again, my new minister of music and I would meet at the altar, shake our heads, and sigh in frustration. But there were some Sundays—great, glorious, powerful Sundays—when the music would be about God’s love and my sermon would be about God’s love. Harmony! Bliss! Laura and I would meet at the altar and dance a little jig of celebration over how the Spirit had moved. (Good thing this didn’t happen too often since we were in a Baptist church.)

After a few magnificent, “coincidental” Sundays when the music and the message matched, we came up with an idea. What if I would call Laura on Wednesday and tell her what I was

planning to preach the following Sunday? Revolutionary, right? (Remember, I was only twenty-one. More advanced planning strategies had not yet penetrated my youthful cerebral cortex.) So Laura and I established a weekly phone call, during which I would explain my sermon topic so that she could select music and choir anthems accordingly. More and more often, we saw the Spirit move in our services. Amazing.

Thinking back on this early stab at creating powerful worship services makes me shudder, not just because my preaching was so bad (it was!), but also because I often blamed the Spirit for what was clearly a systems issue. My defunct worship planning was hindering God's Spirit from working at the highest level. I pointed a frustrated finger at the Spirit when I should have been pointing a finger at my own poor planning. Here's what I've since learned: the Holy Spirit is present in all our churches every Sunday, desiring to engage our hearts and change lives for the sake of Jesus Christ. Our worship planning systems will either complement or hinder the Spirit's work. The choice is ours: we can either cooperate with the Spirit or block his blessing. Which would you rather do?

Personally, I want to live every day of my life—and especially those days when I'm preaching God's messages—in harmony with God's Spirit! I want the Spirit to flow through our worship pastor and worship team, through our artistic worship expressions, and through the preaching of his Word. And I bet you do too! That's exactly what this book is designed to help you do. In the pages ahead, you will discover a worship planning system that you can adapt and use in your church to see results each and every Sunday, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

A Note on Systems

In case you aren't familiar with the concept of utilizing systems in your church, allow me to give you a brief overview. Those of you who are parents know the awe that comes with holding your newborn baby in your arms. Even though babies are born every day, each one is a miracle. Think back to the last time you looked at ten tiny fingers and toes or watched a little chest move up and down, drawing breath. By cliché, that baby is a bundle of joy, but she is also a bundle of something else. She is a bundle of perfectly formed, intricate systems that are already working together to keep her alive.

Thanks to her tiny circulatory system, her heart is pumping blood through her veins. Thanks to her respiratory system, her lungs are taking in air. Her digestive system is breaking down her mother's milk from the very first drop, and her muscular system is letting her wrap her little hand around her father's finger. Even in a brand-new baby, each of these systems and others are fully developed, fully functioning, and ready to grow with her as she starts her journey toward adulthood.

God is into systems. He organized the universe with systems. He established the measurement of time through a system. And, from the beginning, he formed our bodies as a cohesive unit of systems. Adam and Eve—unblemished specimens of God's craftsmanship—were compilations of the systems that caused them to function. They were perfect adult examples of that newborn baby. Without systems humming under the surface, they would not have been able to walk or even breathe. They wouldn't have been able to experience the pleasures of the garden. Without their systems, they would have remained unmolded lumps of clay, unable to fulfill the purposes of God. From the

beginning, God has put systems to work, providing the mechanics and the platform through which he shows his greatness.

One more thing about Adam and Eve. What do we know about them for sure? What was the blueprint God used in creating them? Himself. Genesis affirms that God created man in his own image. Don't miss this: God created beings who function through systems and said that they were created in his own image. God is into systems.

Paul understood God's affinity for systems. That's why, in trying to help us wrap our minds around how the church should function, he compared the body of Christ to the human body. He aligned the design of the church with the functioning of our own different parts. In Romans, Paul writes, "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (12:4–5 NIV). Sounds remarkably like how God designed our physical bodies with systems, right? Go back and read the verse again substituting the word *systems* every time you see the word *members*. Makes perfect sense. All the parts of the body—both the church body and the physical body—work together, allowing us to fulfill God's purposes and plans on this earth. And both of those respective bodies function best through well-developed systems.

A system is any ongoing process that saves you stress, *time*, *energy*, and *money* and continues to produce results. Good systems function under the surface to keep things running smoothly so that you can concentrate on more important priorities. Thankfully, you don't have to think about the fact that your neurological system is allowing you to read and process this information.

That system is doing its job impeccably, or you wouldn't be able to understand the words in front of you. But if you begin to see a decline in your cognitive ability—if all of a sudden you cannot remember or analyze information in the way you always have—you will have to deal with the stress of knowing something is wrong and put a lot of money, time, and energy into figuring out where the breakdown is occurring. We may not be aware of a good system when it is running well, but there is no mistaking when something isn't working like it should.

The same is true in the church. We know that the church is a body, so it follows that the church also has systems working beneath the surface. I contend that the church is made up of eight systems: the worship planning system, the evangelism system, the assimilation system, the small groups system, the ministry system, the stewardship system, the leadership system, and the strategic system. (To learn more about all eight of these systems, download the free “Church Systems” report at www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/Engage.)

Since my time at the little church in Charlotte, I've learned quite a bit about systems and how they hum beneath the surface of every thriving church. Each of the eight church systems is vitally important—a church couldn't be healthy with one missing any more than we could be healthy if one of our bodily systems shut down—but the worship planning system holds a key position in relation to the others. Our worship services are the front door through which people have the opportunity to enter into a relationship with Jesus and begin the journey toward becoming fully developing disciples. Each week, we work as co-laborers with the Holy Spirit to draw people to God for his glory. Without our worship services, our churches wouldn't

exist. Without the worship planning system, there is no need for any of the other seven systems.

In 2002, my understanding of worship planning expanded exponentially. That's when I launched The Journey Church in New York City and began my partnership with Jason Hatley, The Journey's first pastor of worship arts. To this day, as my colleague and friend, Jason fills the same role with excellence. As you read *Engage*, you'll notice that it is written in my voice (Nelson Searcy). But I have to stress that, while I am the lead pastor of The Journey Church, the worship planning system you are about to discover is the result of a team effort. The lessons shared here have been equally developed through my ministry relationship and personal friendship with Jason. Jason is a musician, a strategist, an artist, a team builder, and a system designer. That's quite a package for one person. We both trust that you'll be able to benefit from our unique collaboration.

Throughout these pages, you'll have the opportunity to benefit from all that Jason and I have learned about worship planning the hard way. I trust that our struggle will enable you to implement a strong worship planning system more quickly than we did. Hopefully, our successes will be an encouragement to you—and proof that a high level of integrated, Spirit-driven planning is possible in your church too. I also like to think that all we've learned about relationships and teamwork throughout this process will be a model for you and your worship pastor. And perhaps our vocabulary will be embraced and implemented by your church as well. This book will teach you new words and phrases, such as preaching calendar, worship planning, creative planning meeting, message run-through, and the Thursday midnight rule. In the pages ahead, you'll discover:

- how to plan life-changing services each week
- how to ask the right questions before starting to plan
- how to break out of the cycle of stressful week-to-week planning
- how to utilize creative elements effectively
- how to bridge the common gaps between pastors and worship pastors
- how to develop a worship philosophy that both staff and volunteers can support
- how to evaluate and improve worship services each week
- how to plan months in advance for maximum impact
- how to (and why to!) develop a preaching calendar
- how to use the seasons of the year to maximize effectiveness
- how to create a culture of feedback based on common goals

You have a great journey ahead, as you prayerfully work through the pages in your hand. Thanks in advance for allowing God to use this book to speak to you, your pastor/worship pastor, and your worship team so that together we can all experience the full measure of what he wants to do in our churches each and every Sunday.

How to Get the Most out of This Book

1. Read with a pen in hand. Allow God's Holy Spirit to speak to you as you read, and capture the thoughts he brings to mind on paper.
2. Read with your worship pastor (or, if you are the worship pastor, read with your pastor). Take six weeks or so and make *Engage* the topic of your weekly meetings.

3. Share *Engage* with your teaching team, if you have one. Again, study the book over a set period with all your teaching pastors.
4. Take a season to study *Engage* with everyone who assists you in planning worship—both laity and ministers. I cannot overstate the value of having everyone on the same page when it comes to your worship philosophy and the resulting system.
5. Check out *Engage*'s website for additional information, free resources, downloads of documents included in the book, and more at www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/Engage.
6. Share *Engage* with a fellow pastor—learn and return. Learn from the pages ahead and then return your knowledge to the kingdom by recommending *Engage* to someone else who may benefit from more engaged worship planning for more transforming worship services.

For God's glory, keep reading!

PART 1

philosophy of worship

1

why ask why?

Determining Your Philosophy of Worship

Philosophy, rightly defined, is simply the love of wisdom.

Cicero

If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom.

James 3:13

Have you ever stopped to examine why you do things the way you do? I recently heard a story about a young, newlywed couple trying to navigate the intricacies of marriage several hundred miles from their families. One night, as the two were preparing dinner, the husband was peeling potatoes at the

sink when he noticed his wife cutting the ends off the uncooked roast and throwing them away.

After she had seasoned the meat and put it in the oven, he asked her, “Why did you cut the ends off the roast? The ends are the best part.”

Shooting him a don’t-question-my-methods look, she answered, “Because. Well, just because . . . Actually, I’m not sure. That’s the way my mom always does it.”

Determined to save future end pieces and to get to the bottom of this mystery, the young man called up his mother-in-law and asked, “Why do you cut the ends off a roast before you cook it?”

The mother-in-law nonchalantly said, “I’ve just always done it that way. That’s the way my mother did it.”

Now the new husband was getting frustrated. Not willing to let the issue go, he put the mother-in-law on hold and called his new grandmother-in-law. When everyone was on the line together, he asked, “Grams, why do you cut the ends off a roast before you cook it?”

The grandmother gave a surprised laugh. “Because my pan is too small to fit a whole roast! Why do you ask?”

While tradition is generally a good thing, sometimes it can get us into trouble. If we aren’t careful, we end up doing things a certain way simply because it’s the way things have always been done. We never stop to question the mind-set behind the method. This is especially true when it comes to the way we plan and implement our worship services. We rarely pause to think about why we structure our time the way we do, why we have six songs instead of five, why we sing the style of songs we sing, why we have awkward silences during our transitions, why we receive the offering when, and how we do . . . You get the idea.

We get comfortable with the standard mode of operation and forget to ask the most important question we can ask: why?

You and I will never be able to reach the height of our effectiveness until we step back and examine why we do the things we do. Are you operating out of tradition, or are you working from a plan to create the best worship experiences possible and cooperate with God in transforming lives? To answer this question and move forward into God's highest plan for your church, you have to take some time to think about your philosophy of worship.

Philosophy, as Cicero said in the first century BC, is simply the love of wisdom. I would also add "love of study" to Cicero's definition. So, philosophy is the love of study and wisdom. In our context, it's the why behind how we structure and run our services. Philosophy, as it relates to worship, is not an ephemeral examination of human interaction with God within the context of the church; it's not your style, though it will help you determine your style. It is a wisdom-driven examination of why you do church the way you do. It's important that you take the time to ask yourself why and then answer your own question. Ultimately, your philosophy of worship will define, motivate, and serve as a measure for your worship services. You can't measure what you can't define, and you can't manage what you can't measure.

Ultimately, your philosophy of worship will define, motivate, and serve as a measure for your worship services.

Your current philosophy of worship is likely one you've fallen into by default—one you were handed by leaders before you, or

one you've settled into without much intentional thought. The best way to get an idea of your current philosophy of worship and to determine your ideal philosophy is to play a little word game. Grab some key staff members and get their insight here too. While this is a simple exercise, it is not necessarily easy. But it will be very informative.

On the lines below, write five words that describe your current worship services. Be brave with your answers. Think about what people in your church would say if you were to ask them to describe your services. Honesty is key. If you think your people would call your services boring or long, write those things down. Face your current reality. You can't get where you want to go without first acknowledging where you are.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

The next part of the exercise is more fun. Take a minute to jot down five words you *wish* described your worship services. Here are a few to help you get started:

engaging	inspiring	life-changing	inviting
relevant	passionate	biblical	authentic
God-glorifying	fun	energizing	strong

Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once said, "The limits of your words are the limits of your world." Don't limit yourself or God's dream for your worship. Imagine your church at its best.

Think outside the box. What words would you like to describe your services? Feel free to borrow from the suggestions above.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Based on the ten words you've written, how big is the chasm between your current worship services and your ideal worship services? How do you cross that divide? If you want to have services that can be described in the way you've just imagined, the first step is to clearly define the philosophy of worship that will get you there. Start by examining the why behind your current state of affairs, and then set about determining a philosophy that will take you and your church to the heights of influence God intends. (You can download a free copy of The Journey's philosophy of worship at www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/Engage.)

Molding the worship planning system to our church's vision and structure without losing the integrity of either the system or our own identity was easy. Everything we do is now run through this system. We are growing closer together as a cohesive unit, aiming for the same goals and celebrating the same successes. I think I may have read about another church somewhere that experienced a similar situation: "And they were all in one place, in one accord." Imagine that. It really is possible!

Keith Kannenberg, Lead Pastor
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