



THE
Dwell Richly
COURSE

leading others in singing the gospel

APPENDIX 1

A1. Planning a Service

Intro

Where we place songs (and liturgy¹) in a service, and how one song leads to another, can be key ways to help people behold Christ through the gospel as we sing. Since the Early Church, many have sought to tell the story of the gospel through the shape of the service.²

Whatever our role in shaping a service, these principles show us what our priorities should be and gives us some practical guidelines. Even if we're not in charge overall, we can contribute in a helpful, word-centred way.

This isn't the only way to structure a service, but it can be a helpful tool to help us communicate the gospel clearly. Here is one way to approach helping people behold Christ in the shape of the service...

1. Understanding the passage

Our starting point for this is the passage being preached on in the service. Since we want to let the words dwell in us richly, and the preaching of God's word is the primary way we hear God's voice, we can build a service around the sermon passage for that day. This will mean that, when we come to the sermon itself, people's hearts and minds have already engaged with the truth of the sermon passage – we're thinking and feeling rightly about it, and we've begun to see Christ in it. We've been immersed in the thoughts and feelings of the passage for the whole front end of the service, which will help the word dwell richly in us as we hear it preached.

2. Finding a gospel shape

Having done our best to understand the passage, we can ask specific questions of a Bible passage to help us identify the shape of the gospel flowing through it by asking questions like these:

1 Words that are said corporately or read aloud, e.g. confessions of sin, the Apostle's Creed, collects etc.

2 For a detailed study of this, see Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship* (MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

Read Isaiah 6:1-10

What do we see here of God's character?

What do we see of the human condition?

How does this passage point to Christ?

What response does the writer want us to have?

What does this passage tell us about the gospel?

Clear communication with the preacher here is absolutely key so that the structure of the service aligns well with what they'll say. They may emphasise the main theme of the passage differently to us, which will affect how we structure the service.

3. Shaping a service

Once we've asked these questions of a passage, and identified how it shows us Christ, we can pick songs and liturgies that will walk us through the gospel as we progress through the service.

Our church services aren't a blank canvas every week; we'll already have an established pattern and flow to our services, for example following traditional liturgy or by always singing a group of songs together. Our aim is to utilise that rhythm to walk people through the gospel as expressed in our passage for that day.

Here's an example of how we might develop these questions into a service structure:

Passage	Gospel Shape	Song/Liturgy ideas
Isa. 6:1-4	Adoration: God is holy and glorious	Holy, holy, holy ³
Isa. 6:5	Confession: We are unclean sinners, and can't be near such a holy God	Come, thou Fount of every blessing ⁴ Corporate confession of sin
Isa. 6:6-7	Assurance and thanksgiving: our sin is atoned for in the sacrifice of Christ! Through Him we can approach God's throne with confidence	Reading: Hebrews 10:19-25 Before the throne of God above ⁵ , Man of Sorrows ⁶
Isa. 6:8-10	Response: We live holy lives to please our Saviour	O great God of highest heaven ⁷

Sometimes, we'll walk through the story of the gospel many times in one service. Other times, the passage will lend itself to another structure. But this method can help us structure services with a gospel shape.

Don't be afraid to break the norm

If our main aim is to let the truth of *this* particular passage dwell richly in us, we have the freedom to adjust our pattern of service to best reflect that. We might choose not to start the service with a loud, up-tempo song if the passage that guides our corporate worship is a Psalm of lament. We might sing more than one song after the sermon if we want to embed a particular truth and we have well-known songs that fit the theme well. As much as we might be used to starting our services with a "bang" or choosing songs in the same key to maintain a musical flow, our higher priority is to minister the gospel through the songs we sing and through the shape of the service. That will be of greater spiritual benefit to the congregation.

Change things slowly

Remember to include elements your congregation is used to, such as liturgies and the Lord's Prayer. Don't throw in too many new ideas or songs at once – or throw out too many old ones! We want to serve our congregations by helping them see the gospel through the shape of the service.

3 John Bacchus Dykes, public domain.

4 Robert Robinson, public domain.

5 Charitie Lees Bancroft and Vikki Cook © 1997 Sovereign Grace Worship.

6 Brooke Ligertwood, Matt Crocker © 2012 Hillsong Music Publishing.

7 Bob Kauflin © 2006 Sovereign Grace Praise.

Maintain a balance

We need to keep a balance of songs in our services. As well as maintaining a doctrinally balanced diet across our pool of songs and hymns (see Appendix 2), we'll want to strike a balance within our services between reminding of and responding to the gospel. The best meals are balanced across all the courses, not three rounds of steak or three rounds of salad! Songs and hymns with lots of words, which remind us of the gospel are best balanced with simpler ones that give us space to respond. If all our songs are theologically "meaty", we might be prone to feeling overloaded and stop engaging. If we're too theologically "light", we may not be clear what we're responding to, and our services might feel ungrounded and over-emotional.

Receiving feedback and making adjustments

Having spent so long finding the meaning of a passage, identifying a gospel shape and choosing songs and liturgies, we may find it hard for others to give feedback and change our plans. We must remember our big aim: to help people behold Christ as His word dwells in them – not for people to follow our plan!

Sometimes, after our pastor has spent a long time studying the passage, they may change the focus of their sermon, and we'll need to change things. Rather than go on the defensive, the writer of Hebrews shows us how to respond:

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you. – Hebrews 13:17

Pray!

As we handle God's word and seek to show people the gospel through the shape of the service, we must humbly exercise dependence on God. We desperately need the Holy Spirit's help to understand God's word, and help show people Christ. Ask the Lord to teach you through His word, that you might show Christ to others.

Things to read and listen to

1. For more on the gospel shape of a service, see Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Worship*⁸ and Mike Cosper's *Rhythms of Grace*⁹
2. *Worship by the Book* (Edited by D. A. Carson)¹⁰ gives several helpful examples of service outlines from different church traditions
3. *Dig Deeper* by Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach¹¹ gives helpful tools for better understanding Bible passages

8 (MI: Baker Academic, 2009)

9 (Illinois: Crossway, 2013)

10 (Michigan: Zondervan Press, 2002)

11 (Nottingham: IVP, 2005)

THE
Dwell Richly
COURSE

[MUSIC-MINISTRY.ORG/DWELL-RICHLY](https://music-ministry.org/dwell-richly)