

worship@wade

Purpose Statement

The worship service at the Wade Center exists to facilitate a dialogue between God and His people, communicating the incomparable glory of God through His Word to young people in an understandable way and leading them in individual and corporate response to God through prayer, song and other Scriptural forms of worship so that God is glorified and hearts are changed.

UNDERSTANDING WORSHIP

All human beings – Christians, agnostics, even atheists – are worshippers. Nonbelievers worship many idols of their own creation, exchanging “the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man” (Rom. 1:23, NIV). Believers, on the other hand, worship the single Being truly worthy of worship, their Creator and Redeemer, the Living God.

Their worship of God is to be guided by biblical principles, for God has clearly revealed how He is to be properly worshipped. In His encounter with the Samaritan woman by the well, Jesus said the kind of worshiper the Father seeks are those who worship in spirit and in truth. In other words, at its most basic level, worship must engage both the heart and the head, both emotions and thoughts. Any worship service that does not facilitate worshipping *both* in spirit and in truth has fallen short of the biblical mandate.

In Spirit. Jesus' statement makes it clear God cares about the heart attitudes of those who come to worship Him. John Piper has written that to worship “in spirit” is the opposite of worshipping through empty formalism and traditionalism, which both focus on externals. Instead, he writes, “Strong *affections* for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of biblical worship”¹ (emphasis added). Jesus warned the Pharisees that their focus on the externals made their worship “in vain,” saying in quoting from Isaiah 29:13 in Matthew 15:8-9: “These people honor me with their *lips*, but their *hearts* are far from me. They worship me *in vain*; their teachings are but rules taught by men” (NIV, emphasis added). It is, then, possible to worship God with the lips and not the heart, and it is this type of worship that is useless both to God and to the worshipper. Instead, the worshipper should naturally be moved to heart-felt reactions of silent reverence and awe at God's holiness (Psa. 33:8, 46:10, Hab. 2:20), brokenness, contrition, and grief over man's sin (Psa. 51:17, Isa. 57:15), longing for communion with God (Psa. 42:1-2, 73:25-26, 63:1), hope (Psa. 42:5-6, 130:5) and pleasure, joy and delight in God Himself (Psa. 16:11, 27:4, 37:4).²

¹ John Piper, *Desiring God Revised and Expanded* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), 81-82.

² John Piper, *Desiring God Revised and Expanded* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), 86-87.

In Truth. The worshipper is moved to these emotions, but moved *by what?* Feelings can be fabricated, faked and manipulated, and emotions can be based on untruths. That is why Jesus commanded that our worship be “in truth.” Feelings not rooted in God’s truth are useless both to God and to the worshipper. As Jesus prayed that we be sanctified in the truth, which is the Word of God (John 17:17), the worship service should be filled with readings from sacred Scripture. It is these biblical truths that will ignite the affections of worshippers. As John MacArthur has said, “Worship is an overflow of a mind renewed by the truth of God.”³

Some churches err by worshipping in truth but not in spirit – getting caught up in rigid traditions void of any heart connections. Theirs is religion of the lips only that the Lord Himself said was “in vain” (Matt. 15:8-9). Often, those who worship in truth but not spirit focus on God’s transcendence and never enjoy His immanence, making Him seem aloof and unloving.⁴ They focus so much on the external that any personal experiences of God are viewed as completely unimportant. Michael Horton has written: “Biblical Christianity is concerned with what happened outside us, two thousand years ago, outside the city of Jerusalem. It is an “over there” religion, not an “in here” religion. It is centered on what happened externally, not on what happens internally.”⁵ Horton has also written against contemporary praise songs that refer to drawing close to the Lord.⁶ These views are examples of what results when one loses the balance between God’s transcendence and immanence, exalting in half of the truth and failing to worship in spirit. The truth is “it is good to be near God” (Psalm 73:28, NIV), that believers should draw near to God in full assurance of faith, and He will draw near to them (Heb. 10:22, James 4:8). The truth is also that while Christianity is external and objective, it is also internal and subjective. Faith is a personal experience with a personal God, a God who lives *inside* His children (1 Cor. 3:16). Many of the praise songs found in Scripture (e.g., the Psalms) are directed to God on this personal level, speaking in the first-person about personal experiences with Him. Believers must not err by sacrificing God’s immanence for His transcendence. Worship is not to be in truth alone, but also in spirit, for God *inhabits* the praise of His people (Psa. 22:3).

However, believers must also be careful not to err on the other side – by worshipping in spirit but not in truth. Some churches emotionally and passionately worship that which they truthfully do not know (John 4:22) or even desire to know. Theirs is a zeal without knowledge (Rom. 10:2). Those who worship in spirit but not in truth often focus on God’s nearness and love while downplaying his exaltation and majestic holiness, losing sight of omnipotence and sovereignty.⁷ They lose site of the Bible’s command to worship in reverence and awe (Heb. 12:28). While Christianity is a personal experience with a merciful God, one must also remember the bigger picture that the reason God’s mercy is needed is that God’s holiness that demands perfection (Matt. 5:48), and that all humans fall short of that perfection (Rom. 3:9-18). Also, one must never forget that it is the objective truth that Christ died for sinners two millennia ago that has made personal salvation of sinners a reality today (Rom. 5:6). Believers must not err by worshipping in spirit and not in truth.

³ From an essay entitled “Do You Draw Near?” on his Website, www.gty.org.

⁴ John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1997), p. 14.

⁵ *In the Face of God* (Dallas: Word, 1996), p. 124.

⁶ *In the Face of God* (Dallas: Word, 1996), p. 200.

⁷ John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1997), p. 14.

worship@wade seeks to find the appropriate balance so that those who worship in this service will worship in both spirit *and* truth, remembering that God is both the omnipresent Almighty Lord of heaven and earth as well as the Spirit who lives inside all believers, the Father who calls His children to draw near, to approach the throne of grace boldly (Heb. 4:16). To neglect either side is perilous, for it would misrepresent God's character.

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP

In order to do worship as God has ordained, it is necessary that the service be organized properly. It must provide both "channels for the mind to apprehend the truth of God's reality and channels for the heart to respond to the beauty of that truth."⁸ Every element of worship@wade will be structured around one of these two channels – either hearing from God or responding to God.

Hearing God. Before worshippers can be expected to respond to God's truth in gratitude, contrition, joy, and other ways, they must first hear God's truth. The heart cannot exult that which the mind has not first perceived. Worship planners should not expect worshippers to come to the service with the glorious truths of God forefront in their minds, ready to worship. To the contrary, believers often come to church still carrying with them the worries and anxieties of life. Worship leaders must make a deliberate, purposeful choice to confront them with the holiness, majesty, mercy, and loving kindness of Almighty God, which will then enable them to truly worship. This message can be conveyed through many channels, including songs and prayers, but the primary means by which God has ordained that His children be spiritually fed is through the reading of His Word. For that reason, early in the worship@wade service, supremacy and preeminence will be given to the awesome task of hearing the message of God in Scripture. This will take many forms, including readings from God's Word by the worship team, responsive readings taken directly from the Bible and graphical and visual representations of Scripture conveyed through prerecorded video and audio pieces. Thus, in worship@wade, the primary way God's voice is heard is through the direct presentation of His Word, and this must be done before worshippers can be expected to respond in praise. As Pastor Mark Roberts, writes: "Too often, I must confess, I expect people to worship before I have let the biblical vision of God inspire them. Then I wonder why they aren't 'into it.'"⁹ All too often in today's churches, worshippers aren't "into it" because worship planners have not adequately created the channels by which they hear God's truth. Instead, these churches focus solely on the other channel – responding to God. While this is important, it is critical to first hear from God before responding to Him.

Responding to God. After being confronted with the truth of God through the channel of hearing from His Word, then, worshippers will be led through appropriate channels to respond to God. The primary, but not only, means will be through song. The Psalms and the book of Revelation (as well as many prophetic books of the Bible) show that singing is a God-ordained and blessed artful way that humans reflect back to God His glorious attributes and worth (Psalm 96:6-8). Just as the Psalms express a variety of responses to who God is, so the hymns and

⁸ John Piper, *Desiring God Revised and Expanded* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), 104.

⁹ "My Vision for Worship at Irvine Presbyterian Church." *Worship Leader Magazine*, January/February, 2003, p. 66.

songs selected for the worship service will express praise (c.f. Psa. 8, 24, 29, 33, 47, 48), petition (c.f. Psa. 25, 39, 51, 86, 102, 120), thanksgiving (c.f. Psa. 18, 66, 107, 118, 138), trust (c.f. Psa. 23, 121, 131) and other appropriate responses to the truth of God.¹⁰ Also, just as many of the Psalms are written in first person, songs will not be excluded from inclusion in worship@wade simply because they are written from a human standpoint, using the word "I." As these songs are primarily responses to God rather than channels of hearing from God, it is appropriate that many be written in this style – in both first personal singular and plural. Songs will be selected that are both complex (covering a large amount of theology in an overview, c.f. Psa. 68, 119) and simple (meditating on a few truths, c.f. Psa. 23, 100, 131, 133). Aside from songs, the other primary means through which worshippers will respond to God's truth is through prayer. Prayer will be structured around themes of adoration (c.f. Luke 1:46-55), confession (c.f. Luke 18:13, Psa. 51), thanksgiving (c.f. 1 Thess. 1:2, Psa. 75) and supplication (c.f. Matt. 7:7, Phil. 4:6) each week, as Scripture exemplifies and commands (Matt. 6:9-13).

The order of worship will be structured to help those who have gathered come to the highest levels of worship. All worshippers recall times when they felt more or less "connected" with God. It is natural, for a variety of reasons, to be at any of several stages of worship, according to John Piper. The lowest stage is characterized by the realization that there is scarcely any longing at all for the worship of God and sorrow over this lack of feeling. The next stage is distinguished by longing for the goodness of the Lord, which seems far off and unreachable. The final stage is seen when those who worship feel unencumbered joy, "satisfied with the excellency of God."¹¹ It is the task of those who plan the worship service to remove the encumbrances that prevent believers from delighting in God, enjoying God, and thus glorifying Him.

CONTROVERSIES IN WORSHIP PLANNING

Beyond broad, overarching goals, planning a weekly worship service involves answering questions on which many Christians disagree. However, these questions must be addressed. How will worship@wade be contextualized to its target audience? How will the worship service relate to "seekers"? What art forms and elements of culture will have a place in worship during worship@wade?

Contextualized to the Audience. It is the view of those who plan worship@wade services that elements of worship services have always and will always continue to change. From ancient Hebrew melodies, to simple Gregorian chants, to majestic classical hymns, to country-western influenced Southern Gospel hymns, to spirited African American gospel music, to the soft-rock sound of praise music of today, the music of the church has always been evolving. Even today, depending on the what continent of the world or even neighborhood of the United States Christians are found, their music and forms of worship will be as varied as the cultures around them. It would be unnatural and unwise to force an African or Asian believer to sing a Southern Gospel melody and speak in another language during worship. It is clear the message has not changed, but the forms, channels, vehicles and means by which that message is conveyed has changed and will continue to change. As John Piper has said, "In the end, the form is not the issue. The issue is whether the excellency of Christ is seen."¹²

¹⁰ *Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003), 804.

¹¹ John Piper, *Desiring God Revised and Expanded* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2003), 96-97.

¹² John Piper, *Desiring God Revised and Expanded* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2003), p. 107.

Scripture spells out clearly what is required of worshippers, and nowhere does it mandate one style of music over another, one way of speaking over another, etc. Since worship@wade is targeted toward young adults, nonbelievers, new believers and those who grew up in church but have been estranged from fellowship for several years, worship will be contextualized for them, meaning modern translations of the Bible will be used (e.g., New International Version, New American Standard Bible, New King James Version, New Living Translation, The Message, etc.), and in all other elements of the service, prayer, teaching and singing will be done in *their* language, the conversational language of the “common man,” coincidentally, the same kind of language God chose to use when inspiring the Bible. Eugene Peterson comments in his translation of the Bible, *The Message*, that a striking feature of the New Testament is that it was written in the street language of the day, the type of language used in playgrounds and marketplaces, using simple words one might expect find on a grocery list, not in a philosophical book. He wrote: “Some people are taken aback by this, supposing that language dealing with a holy God and holy things should be elevated – stately and ceremonial. But one good look at Jesus – his preference for down-to-earth stories and easy association with common people – gets rid of that supposition.”¹³ Jesus and His apostles both chose to use simple language to convey their message (1 Cor. 2:1-5). In our service, worship will use this same style of speaking and singing. Ornate, “flowery,” carefully scripted language that calls attention to itself will be avoided because it hinders communication and because God’s model in Scripture is to make worship accessible.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul regulates worship, making it clear that it must be intelligible to believers in attendance and even, to a certain extent, to nonbelievers who may be present. One aspect of intelligibility is contemporaneity. To make worship accessible and intelligible, no archaic language will be used at worship@wade. The concept can also be applied to other elements of the service. John Frame explains: “Most congregations today have departed from King James English, and for good reason. That form of English is a barrier to communication if it is the predominant language of worship. As with language, not all music is equally understandable to all people.”¹⁴ Realizing that depending on the audience, certain musical styles are better vehicles than others to deliver messages, styles appropriate for the college-age audience will be selected. Thus, in all aspects of worship, intelligibility, understandability and, to a certain extent, relevance will be considered. Without compromising the message, worship planners will work to find the most relevant and understandable channels to convey that channel.

This may be difficult, as every person has natural biases and preferred styles. Realizing this, believers must guard against the sin of musical snobbery. That can be seen in one who loves high art and cannot bring himself to explore popular culture or in one who considers himself modern and will not listen to anything that is not current and up-to-date. Scripture calls both to have charity toward those with differing stylistic preferences. And God call both to yield their personal preferences to the needs of the congregation. We feel our congregation’s culture is best served best by a mix of hymns and songs set to contemporary instrumentation and presented using the best that modern technology has to offer.

¹³ Eugene Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2002), p. 1741-42.

¹⁴ *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1997), p. 19.

In seeking to use modern technology wisely, the planners of worship@wade are not seeking to depart from tradition. Tradition is valuable. However, one must be careful not to make the traditions of men binding, as only the Word of God should be. The founders of Reformation theology knew this all too well. John Frame has written: "We revere Luther and Calvin because they had the courage to rethink from the ground up, the current traditions about salvation and worship. They were respectful of tradition, as all Christians should be. But they were not bound to it, only to the God of Scripture."¹⁵ Like Luther and Calvin, those involved in this service will respect tradition and learn from it, though they will never be bound to it. The only eternal, enduring, manual for worship is sacred Scripture, and nothing else. Our service will be modeled after biblical worship and not be tied to worship forms created by fallible men in recent or more distant history. Even if these worship forms are in and of themselves Scriptural, they are not the *only* form of acceptable worship, and to rigidly follow them would be a handicap to worship@wade, which is targeted to a completely different and unique audience. If worship@wade were to hold to many of the traditions of the past – for example, speaking in Old English and using antiquated words – in doing so, it would be nullifying the clear command of Scripture to make worship intelligible and accessible. This is just one example of how tradition can never be simply accepted without critically examining it against the clear commands of Scripture. For these reasons, worship@wade will be contextualized to the audience, with intelligibility, contemporaneity, accessibility and relevance always being considered.

Sensitive to the Seeker. Another controversial question is whether or not worship services should be "seeker sensitive"? The phrase has become polluted with many connotations that it should not own. It is the view of those who plan worship@wade services that the Bible actually requires worship planners to be seeker sensitive, in one sense of the phrase (1 Cor. 14:24-25). The service is never to be seeker *driven*, but rather is to be geared toward ushering believers into the presence of God, so that when confronted with His truth, they might respond corporately to Him in worship. While not seeker driven, the service should still be sensitive to seekers who may be present. In declaring the Gospel clearly, preaching Christ crucified (1 Cor. 2:2, 1 Cor. 1:23), God will be glorified, believers will be edified and nonbelievers will clearly hear the only message with the power to save. Being seeker sensitive does not mean the message must be compromised. To the contrary, if worship planners are truly sensitive to the most pressing need of nonbelievers who are present, it will motivate them to create services that all the more clearly present the Gospel. However, reaching the current generation may require worship planners and leaders reach beyond their personal preferences in elements such as musical style. Like Paul, each mature Christian must say I will "become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:22).

Connected to the Culture. Paul was in some ways connected to his culture, becoming like those around him in order to save them. At the same time, he scolded the Corinthians for emulating culture (1 Cor. 1:20, 3:18, 5:1). The question, then, is not how much Christians should be similar to the world, but in what way.¹⁶ For example, today's culture places preeminence on entertainment, and critics say contemporary worship music is too entertaining, thus making it dangerously similar to secular culture. Should all contemporary songs be eschewed from worship, then, simply because some say they are too influenced by today's culture and the high value it places on entertainment? What these critics do not realize is that traditional church

¹⁵ *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1997), p. 4.

¹⁶ *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1997), p. 19.

services are just as “entertaining” in a different sense. Whether it is a raspy singer with a guitar or a classically trained tenor accompanied by organ, the temptation to be entertained by a good performance is always present. Whether it is a slickly produced video or a flawlessly performed organ concerto, worshippers could inadvertently slip into worshipping the worship service rather than the God to which it points. This risk is real, whether the service is contemporary or traditional. John Frame has written: “Bach chorales, even Gregorian chants, have entertainment value. Our concern should not be to eliminate that, but to bring it into the context of a higher purpose.”¹⁷ What is the solution? Should worship planners and leaders make the service devoid of all real talent and make the singing of poor quality simply to avoid the risk of entertaining those gathered? By all means, no! They must organize a service that is of the highest quality, for worship is a spiritual sacrifice (Heb. 13:15), and the sacrifices of God’s children must be the best they have to offer. But at the same time, they must take all precautions possible to help people focus on the object of the song rather than the singer of the song. In summary, should worship planners avoid the risk of becoming too much like culture by completely removing all parts of the service that resemble modernity, such as guitars and video screens? Again, the answer is no because the question is not how much culture should influence worship, but in what ways. The service must speak to the audience in its language, the language of the day, the language of the culture. But the content of what is said must never be the philosophies of the day, but rather the timeless truth of the Word of God. *What* is said never changes; *how* it is said will always change. Form is not the primary issue. Content is. The goal is to convey the excellency of Christ so that true worship can take place, and to do that, worship planners will choose forms that best communicate God’s glory to the target audience. That is how worship is properly connected with culture.

SPECIFIC GOALS FOR WADE’S WORSHIP SERVICE

Within the general goal of excellence, it is important to set specific identifiable, quantifiable and attainable goals. With that in mind, with the help of God, we commit to:

- Renew our minds with the Word of God, which will lead to the transforming of our lives, realizing that if we are to spiritually feed those who attend worship@wade, we must also feed ourselves well and lead lives that are consistent with the message we proclaim. To accomplish this, we commit to daily personal Bible study and discipleship with more mature believers.
- Strive for quality and professionalism in all aspects of the worship service through careful planning and sufficient rehearsal, which will help to eliminate distractions such as wrong notes, clumsy segues and technical glitches. Our careful attention to these details will ensure the technical processes behind the service are transparent, allowing those present to enter into worship unencumbered and only focused on God. To accomplish this, we will have a weekly group Bible study and worship planning session, as well as a weekly rehearsal for practice.
- Aim to communicate God’s message in the clearest, most faithful way possible. To accomplish this, we will compare translations of Bible passages, using the one that is both most faithful to the text and understandable to hearers. We will also compare different

¹⁷ *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1997), p. 60.

- ways the message can be conveyed, including through song, drama, teaching, video or other means, and choose the one that is best able to communicate with the congregation.
- Take seriously the commitments we have made. To accomplish this, we will abide by the agreement we signed at the beginning of the year, endeavoring to be consistent and reliable in our dedication to the worship of Almighty God.

A FINAL WORD

Worship is more than the gathering together of believers for an hour each week to sing, pray, and listen to God's Word proclaimed. For true Christians, worship is our adoring and grateful response to the manifold perfections and infinite beauty of our holy God, which should never end, even through all eternity to come. What takes place inside the walls of the church may be energizing and refreshing, but it is in the world outside where the words we speak and sing during the service are either proven true or false. As Christian recording artist Shaun Groves said, "You may go to church, lift up your voice and your hands and sing for all you're worth, but if you leave and don't feed the hungry, clothe the naked or fight for the poor, you may have worshiped a singer or a song or a service, but you haven't worshiped God."¹⁸

¹⁸ Davin Seay, "What is worship worth?" in *Worship Leader Magazine*, July/August, 2003, p. 19.

APPENDIX 1

The Purpose Statement of Westminster Church (E.P.C.) Section 1 – “A Worshipping People”

The supreme privilege and responsibility of a disciple of Jesus Christ is the worship of Almighty God. Westminster Church seeks to confront her people with the glory, splendor, and holiness of the Living God, which will call forth from us the responses of worship and service. In our times of corporate worship on Sunday mornings, we will seek to usher all who have gathered into the presence of the Almighty. We pray that this will be accomplished as we:

- Give central importance to the proclamation of the Word of God, which is Truth and requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. In the reading and proclamation of the Scripture, we encounter the Living God. The goal of our proclamation will be to impart an understanding of what God's Word says and to demonstrate how we might apply that understanding of the Word to life as we live it and experience it.
- Strive to be sensitive to those who do not yet know Christ as Savior while primarily directing our worship services to the ones who already desire, at whatever level, to worship God. An unbeliever who worships with us on a regular basis should, however, have heard very clearly the Gospel message and be given a chance to respond to the call of Christ. Through our worship, we pray that all who gather with us will experience the presence and power of God through His spirit's work.
- Provide a worship service that is inviting. The worship service is the primary place of entry into the life of the church for most people. Therefore, we will do all that we can to see that it radiates a spirit of openness and friendliness.
- Recognize that music is a tool which the Holy Spirit powerfully uses to draw people into this encounter with God. We include many of the contemporary styles of music while not sacrificing the rich musical heritage that has preceded us in the history of the church.