



THE RHYTHM OF WORSHIP

A GUIDE FOR WORSHIP AT CCNYC

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

-1 Peter 2:9-10

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The purpose of this guide is to help us better understand the rhythm of our worship service and why we do what we do when we gather together as God's people.

If you are not a Christian, our hope is that this will also be of help to you. If you are new to the church or new to Christianity, Christian worship can seem bewildering and at times even completely incomprehensible. As such, we hope that this will give you a better sense of what Christians are doing when they meet together. We also hope that you will keep coming and participating and exploring. Ultimately, we hope that you, too, will be shaped by the rhythm of our worship.



A BRIEF THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

(WHY WORSHIP MATTERS AND WHAT'S HAPPENING WHEN WE WORSHIP)

WORSHIP AS THE ASSEMBLY OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Hebrews 12:22 addresses the church, assembled in worship, with the words: *You have come to Mount Zion.*

It is hard to imagine a more significant description of worship because what this description is saying is that the church, in its act of corporate worship, is assembled before God no less surely than Israel was at Sinai – but more gloriously! Because here at *Mount Zion* there is not an atmosphere of tempest and terror, but rather one of grace and free access to God through the mediator at God's right hand, Jesus Christ. It is this coming to *Mount Zion*, this approach to God through the mediator, which is what happens every time the local church assembles for worship.

As such, the conclusion we must draw is that there is nothing more central or important in our lives than our assemblies of worship. Together, we are meeting with God here! And (as we will see below) it is simply impossible to meet with God and walk away unchanged. What happens in worship will necessarily leave its mark on everything else in our lives.

Therefore, it is important we understand that, yes, God meets with us individually in our own personal private devotions, but it is biblically accurate to say that he meets with us in a fuller and deeper way when we assemble

together as his people. So, you watching a sermon online or going for a walk to meditate on God – good things in their own right – do not at all match, however, the power and importance of the assembling of God's people for worship.

WORSHIP SHAPED BY THE GOSPEL

This also means that the shape (or form, what is often called 'the liturgy') of our worship matters significantly. We need to study the Bible to understand what meetings between God and his people look like – and then we need to arrange our meetings so they look like what the Bible describes.

So, what do we find when we look at the Bible? We find that the people of God are defined as those who gather around the Word of God. In other words, for a church to be a genuine assembly of the people of God, the Bible – the inerrant and infallible Word of God – must be central. Furthermore, we find in the Bible that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is at the very heart of the Bible and is that which supremely defines how God meets with his people. Therefore, ultimately, we want our worship to be driven by the Bible and shaped by the gospel. If you have worshiped at CCNYC for some time, perhaps you have already noticed that the rhythm of our worship is the very rhythm of God's good news to us in Jesus:

Through his Word, God graciously calls us to worship and so we begin by praising God for his GLORY.

**However, to do so leads us to see ourselves for who we are
- as those who have sinned and fallen short of his glory.**

**Therefore, we confess our GUILT
- to ourselves, to one another, and, most importantly, to God.**

**Faced with our guilt, we hear the wonderful news of
God's GRACE
to us in the Lord Jesus Christ as proclaimed to us in his Word.**

**All of which leads to our response of GRATITUDE -
as we profess our faith, sing, tithe, pray, and regularly
gather at the Lord's table where God further strengthens us
in grace.**

**Finally, having now through worship been drawn deeper into
the life of the Triune God and once again re-formed by the
gospel, God sends us back into the world to GO
and share his good news with others.**

Not only does this rhythm of worship capture the centrality of the gospel in the Bible, but also historically this is how Christians have worshiped for thousands of years. Within the Anglican Church this gospel rhythm (particularly that of guilt-grace-gratitude) shapes not only the whole structure of the service, but it is also repeated in various cycles throughout the service – for example, during the Confession, the Prayer for Today, and especially during the service of Holy Communion. In fact, the Anglican pastor and scholar J. I. Packer summarized the effect of these repeated cycles as being like “turns of a screw, each going further than the last in fixing the Gospel in our hearts and drawing out our response to it.”

WORSHIP AS A MEANS OF GRACE

Let us... not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some (Hebrews 10:25). What happens during a worship service? Why should the church make a regular habit of meeting together as Hebrews 10 commands us to do?

Sometimes we think of worship in one of three ways, or in some combination of the following. We think of it as us coming to express our praise to God. And/or we think of it in terms of us coming together to meet with other Christians. And/or we think of it as an opportunity for us to reach out to our friends and neighbors who are skeptical about the Christian faith.

Now, while we at CCNYC believe that all three of those things in some form or another should take place when the church gathers for worship – yes, we certainly should be focusing on God and praising him in our worship, and, yes, we should be delighting in the fellowship we have with other Christians, and, yes, we should be lovingly seeking to engage our skeptical neighbors – what each of those have in common, however, is *our* action. But, foundationally, worship is not simply about us coming together and expressing our love and praise of God; it is about God himself acting in us as the assembly of his people.

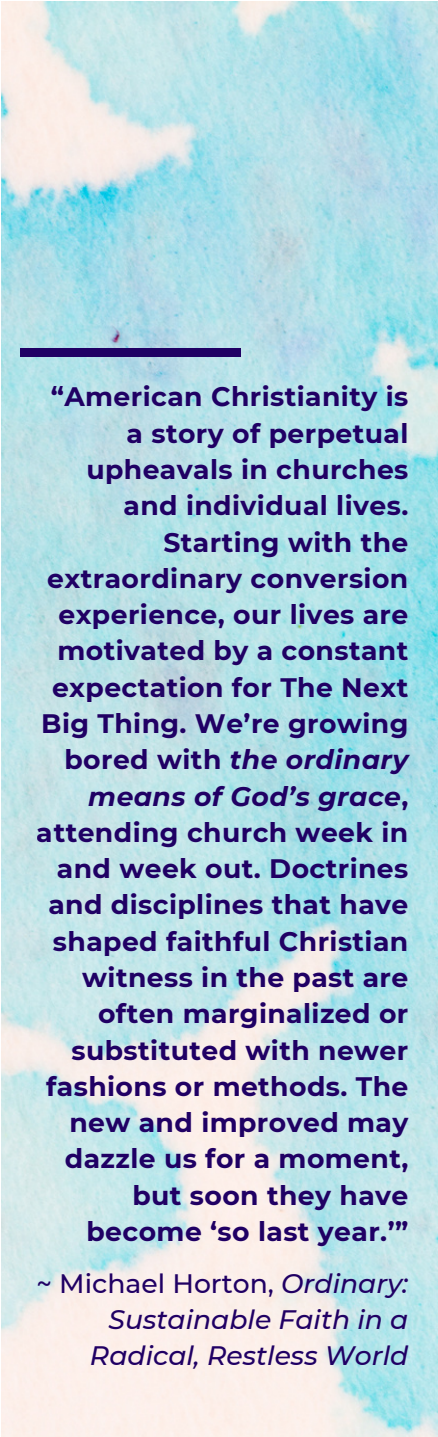
In other words, worship is not simply a response *to* God's grace; it is also what we might call a *means* of God's grace. Or to put it another way: worship is not just about *us doing something*; it is about *God doing something to us*. How so? Because as the assembly of God's people gather around God's Word, God Himself is actively at work. *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...* (Hebrews 4:13). Therefore, when our worship is driven by his Word in such a way that Scripture permeates every aspect of our service – we sing the Word, pray the Word, read the Word, hear the Word, preach the Word, see the Word in the sacraments – we know that God himself is at work.

Furthermore, when the gospel – which is at the very center of God's Word – shapes our worship, we also know that God is at work because this is what the Holy Spirit is about. The Holy Spirit is the one who inspired the Word and who exalts Jesus through the gospel message. Therefore, we can trust that the Holy Spirit is at work when our worship is biblical and when it is shaped by the gospel.

All this means of course that we should never gather for worship without the Word of God and the gospel being central. But it also means that our worship gatherings are even more important than we may have realized. Again, if worship is not simply about us expressing our praise to God, but is in fact God himself at work to create and re-create us by his Word, then we can better understand why the Bible exhorts us to not give up meeting together.

This point is vitally important: worship is not, for example, simply about us gaining more biblical knowledge or singing some songs we like or meeting up with some friends. It is about God working in us through the Word and sacraments, and through a gospel-shaped worship to re-form us. Indeed, biblical, gospel-shaped worship is formative. Through it the Holy Spirit reforms our minds, reorients our hearts in love for God and others, and reconfigures our lives so that we increasingly live for the glory of God alone.

So, consider: when we skip worship or undervalue it or consistently show up late or leave early, we are cutting ourselves off from one of the primary means by which God graciously works in our lives. Are you in despair? Despondent? Struggling? Or do you simply want to grow as a disciple of Jesus? The most important and fundamental 'solution' to all of the above is to first and foremost consistently gather with God's people in weekly biblical, gospel-shaped worship.



**"American Christianity is
a story of perpetual
upheavals in churches
and individual lives.**

**Starting with the
extraordinary conversion
experience, our lives are
motivated by a constant
expectation for The Next
Big Thing. We're growing
bored with the ordinary
means of God's grace,
attending church week in
and week out. Doctrines
and disciplines that have
shaped faithful Christian
witness in the past are
often marginalized or
substituted with newer
fashions or methods. The
new and improved may
dazzle us for a moment,
but soon they have
become 'so last year.'"**

**~ Michael Horton, *Ordinary:
Sustainable Faith in a
Radical, Restless World***

A BRIEF LOOK AT OUR WORSHIP SERVICE

(THE SPECIFICS OF WHAT WE'RE DOING IN WORSHIP)

As we have already noted, our worship service follows the gospel pattern of *glory, guilt, grace, gratitude, and go*. Within that pattern, here are a few additional explanations that we hope will help you more fully engage with and appreciate the rhythm of our worship.

- **Scriptural Call to Worship:** Our various Anglican liturgies begin with a call to gather as God's people with songs of praise to God. This is where we remind ourselves that we have gathered to worship God – he is our focus. There is a clear beginning to our worship service, and this is it. Therefore, it is a very good practice for you to be in your pew at least five minutes before the service starts to prepare your heart and mind to hear and respond to this call to worship the Triune God.
- **The Prayer for Purity and Preparation:** This is perhaps one of the most poignant and searching prayers of all the prayers that we pray in our worship service. Consider that it is no small thing to admit that our hearts are wide open to God.

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, so that we may perfectly love you, and worthily glorify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

- **Invitatory/Invocation/Acclamation:** There are various terms to refer to the call and response that happens near the beginning of the service. The purpose here is to praise God, as well as to ask him to help us to worship him as we ought. Some of the language that is often used here looks like this:

Blessed be God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
And blessed be his kingdom, now and forever. Amen.

O Lord, open our lips;
And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

O God, make speed to save us;
O Lord, make haste to help us.

Praise the Lord.
The Lord's name be praised!

- **Confession:** This is an important part of our coming before God. None of us is perfect; we have all erred and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep (Isaiah 53). However, to quote the prophet Jeremiah, because the heart is deceitful above all else, we all need reminders of God's expectations of us. We can easily go out of church with the same attitudes that we brought into church.

- The theology behind the confession is that the presence of sin still remains even in those who are regenerate. We daily live out the battle of Romans 7. Confession is both essential in terms of being honest before God, ourselves, and others, but it is also a moment of encouragement within the service – we are not hiding behind self-righteous pretenses, but we come to God in repentance and faith and receive the healing message of his forgiveness in Christ.

- The Christian life is one of continued repentance – as Martin Luther expressed in the first of his *95 Theses*: "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said 'Repent', He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

- **Scriptural Words of Comfort and Assurance:** These words, which come directly from Scripture, declare that we are forgiven of our sins because of the finished work of Christ alone. Therefore, we can now rest and rejoice in God's love and grace.

- **The Passing of the Peace:** Because of God's forgiveness we now have peace with him and with one another. We, therefore, extend that peace to others who have gathered for worship.

- **The Creeds:** The creeds serve as concise summary statements of what the Bible teaches, and thus our recitation of them is to declare that our faith is grounded on the Word of God.

- **Prayers of Petition:** Our response of faith to God's gospel message continues as we go to him in prayer, specifically as sons and daughters coming to our heavenly Father who has adopted us by his grace in Jesus through the work of his Spirit.



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- **The Prayer for Today:** This is sometimes called The Collect for Today. In the Anglican Prayer Book, there is a designated prayer for every Sunday of the year, each of which is repeated annually. At Christ Church, it is either prayed near the beginning of the service after Confession, or later in the service during the Prayers of Petition. Anglicans in the past have found it helpful to memorize these short prayers as a way of shaping their own private prayers. You will also find in most of these prayers that the gospel pattern of guilt-grace-gratitude has been beautifully built into them.

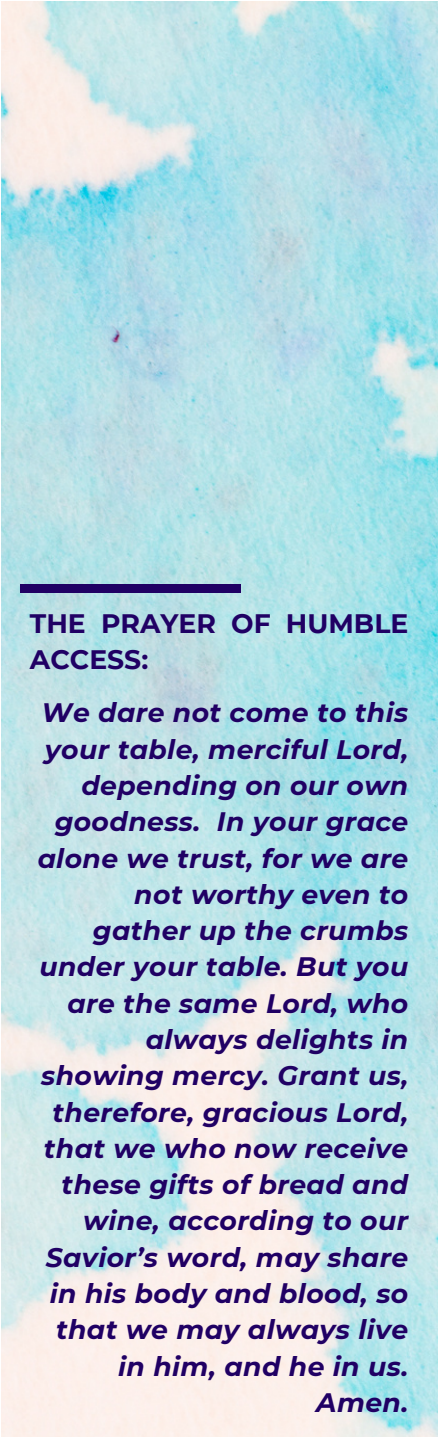


- **Song of Response with Offertory:** Continuing our response to hearing the gospel message of grace in God's Word, we respond with song and with our financial offerings as an act of gratitude. Jesus' warning to us is that we cannot worship both God and money (Matthew 6:24). What we do with our money and how we view money is one of the clearest indications of the quality of our discipleship. To have a time of financial offering in the service is thus a reminder of that call to follow Jesus with all that we are.

Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, so that by patience and the comfort of your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

- **The Ministry of the Word of God:** This is the very center of our worship service. For the people of God are those who gather around the Word of God. Therefore, we pray that we would truly hear God's Word well as it is both read and preached to us. The heart attitude we bring to this is that of humbly sitting under the Word of God (not standing in judgment over it). As such, this portion of the service is largely a monologue: we do not speak, but instead God speaks to us and our job is to listen.
- **Holy Communion / the Lord's Supper:** Our response of faith is most clearly seen as we now publicly come forward to participate in the Lord's Supper, claiming Jesus' substitutionary death as our only hope. However, this is not just a response of faith from us; as we come in faith, the sacrament itself serves as a very means of God's grace by which he continues to strengthen our faith before we are sent back into the world. Some aspects of the Holy Communion service include:

- **The Sursum Corda:** This is a Latin phrase that literally means “lifted hearts.” And that is precisely what we are being called to do here: to *lift our hearts up to the Lord*. John Calvin reminds us of the significance of these words, dispelling the myth that the physical body of Jesus is being brought down upon the Table during Communion. “Let us lift our spirits and hearts on high where Jesus Christ is in the glory of his Father, whence we expect him at our redemption. Let us not be fascinated by these earthly and corruptible elements which we see with our eyes and touch with our hands, seeking him there as though he were enclosed in the bread and wine. Then only shall our souls be disposed to be nourished and vivified by his substance when they are lifted up above all earthly things, attaining even to heaven, and entering the Kingdom of God where he dwells. Therefore let us be content to have the bread and wine as signs and witnesses, seeking the truth spiritually where the Word of God promises that we shall find it.”
- **Sanctus:** This is the thrice-repeated declaration from Isaiah 6 that God is *holy*. It is a reminder of how desperately we need the grace and mercy of God extended to us in Christ and him crucified in order for us to enter into God’s presence.
- **The Prayer of Humble Access:** Here, indeed, we pray to God – casting ourselves only upon his grace and mercy.



THE PRAYER OF HUMBLE ACCESS:

*We dare not come to this
your table, merciful Lord,
depending on our own
goodness. In your grace
alone we trust, for we are
not worthy even to
gather up the crumbs
under your table. But you
are the same Lord, who
always delights in
showing mercy. Grant us,
therefore, gracious Lord,
that we who now receive
these gifts of bread and
wine, according to our
Savior’s word, may share
in his body and blood, so
that we may always live
in him, and he in us.
Amen.*

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- **The Prayer of Consecration:** Here the leader – following the pattern of 1 Corinthians 11 – re-presents Christ's words from his last supper with his disciples.
 - **The Invitation to and Ministration of Communion:** The invitation is not to literally feed on the physical body and blood of Jesus with our mouth and teeth. Rather, we are invited to

Come, let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

In other words, it is a spiritual feeding and the means by which we eat and drink is faith.

- **The Post-Communion Prayer:** Here we pray and offer ourselves as a sacrifice of praise to God, asking for God to use us in this world to point others to him as we eagerly await the return of Jesus and the eternal feast we will enjoy in heaven.
- **Benediction:** We have met with the living God, we have been drawn deeper into his very life, and we have been renewed by his gospel. Therefore, as our worship service draws to a close, through God's minister we hear God's blessing spoken over our lives. The most fitting posture with which to receive this divine blessing is with arms wide open.
- **Announcements:** While people may sometimes see this as an intrusion into the worship, it is a reminder that we are not worshiping God alone and just so happen to be doing so in a room filled with a bunch of other people who are doing the same. Rather, we gather as a congregation who worships and lives life together as God's people. The Announcements point us to that community life we share in as a local church.
- **Dismissal:** Finally, we are reminded that God does not just call us to worship, but that he also sends us back into the world on mission for his glory and the good of others. Our time of worship has now prepared us to go back into the world on this mission.

BENEDICTION:

The most fitting posture with which to receive this divine blessing is with arms wide open.



ON MUSIC

(WHY DO WE SING?)

Throughout Scripture, singing is a means through which God's people can remind themselves of, respond and testify to, and praise God's character and His faithful, redeeming work. Moses and the Israelites sing a song after crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15), and God commands Moses to write and teach a song to the Israelites before he dies so that they can bear witness to and remember God's saving work (Deuteronomy 31:19-22). Jesus and his disciples sing together before Jesus' betrayal (Matthew 26:30), and Paul suggests to the church in Colossae that they teach and admonish one another in the Word through singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16). The Music Ministry at Christ Church exists because of the Scriptural mandate for all believers – not just musicians – to sing.

Not only do we sing, but our services are also structured in such a way that we sing with intentionality. Before we are formally called to worship, we have a **song of gathering** by which we welcome one another and prepare our hearts for worship. Following the Scriptural Call to Worship, the opening hymns are usually **songs of praise** to God. After confessing our sins, we sing a **song of assurance**. Sometimes we sing a **song of preparation** before the sermon as a way of priming our hearts to receive God's Word. Following the sermon we then sing a **song of response** that requires us to faithfully respond to the truth of God's Word that we just heard preached. Finally, the last hymn that we sing is a **song of mission** that is meant to send us back into the world to proclaim the excellencies of Christ.

Not only do we sing, but our services are also structured in such a way that we sing with intentionality.

...Song of GATHERING

...Songs of PRAISE

...Song of ASSURANCE

...Song of PREPARATION

...Song of RESPONSE

...Song of MISSION.

SOME THOUGHTS ON HOW TO PREPARE FOR SUNDAY WORSHIP

Given the importance of corporate worship as a means of God's grace to us, it makes sense that we would prepare ourselves to worship Him. Here are a few thoughts for how you might do that.

- Look for ways to connect the church's rhythm of worship with your own devotional practices at home. The more that practices like Bible reading, singing, and confession permeate your own household in a gospel-shaped and gospel-centered way, the more readily you will be to engage with the church when it gathers together for worship.
- Give particular attention to preparing to listen to God's Word preached:
 - Read the preaching passage several times at home during the week leading up to the sermon. In fact, consider making Sunday's preaching passage your devotional reading for the week.
 - Make sure you reflect on the sermon at some point after church that Sunday as you seek to apply God's Word to your life – always be mindful of James' exhortation to us to *be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves* (James 1:22).
 - For more ideas, check out the book from Christopher Ash, *Listen Up! A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons*. This is usually available on our bookrack downstairs.
- Look for the Friday email which provides an overview of the upcoming worship service – including the preaching passage, the Prayer for Today, and the songs we will be singing.
- Make sure you get plenty of sleep the night before. Tired bodies make for drowsy hearts.
- Be intentional about what you do as you get ready for church on Sunday morning. Make sure you leave yourself plenty of time to arrive early for church so that you are not rushing in. Just as important, check your own heart and seek to begin the day with a joyful and expectant attitude for the ways God will be at work in you as you gather with God's people.
- Above all, pray. Pray before you come to church. Ask God to prepare your heart, to give you a humble and joyful spirit, and then thank him for the privilege of being able to gather with his people in worship.
- Finally, you might find it helpful to ask yourself the following questions:
 - As I look back over the past week, for what can I thank God?
 - Have I asked God's forgiveness for the things I have done and ought not to have done, and for those things that I ought to have done, but have not done?
 - In going to church today, have I prayed for the minister(s) and for people at church?
 - Have I prayed for others and invited one or more to come with me?



ANY QUESTIONS?

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