

WHEN WE GATHER

WEEK 1: THE CALL TO WORSHIP

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

Acts 2:44 ~ “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common.”

Acts 20:7 ~ “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together...”

- Christians since the birth of the church have gathered together for a purpose that they might praise God and grow together in truth; then they depart to spread the gospel of our Savior.
- Many churches will gather together today, and it might look quite different from one church to another. But all that we do has a purpose.
- Over the course of this mini class, we will look more closely at why we do what we do when we gather. Why do we do it when we do it? Why don't we do more? Why do some churches do less?
- We will look at what might be too much, what might be wrong, and why.
- The nature of the class will provide a Biblical foundation that shapes how and why we gather.
- Fall Schedule:
 - September 7: Why Call to Worship?
 - October 5: Worship through Music
 - November 2: Worship in Giving
 - December 7: Scripture Reading
 - January-June: Prayer, Word, Ordinances, One Anothers, Witness, Homes, Missions Moments

WHY DO WE GATHER?

Hebrews 10:24-25 ~ “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

- According to Don Whitney, “There’s an element of worship and Christianity that cannot be experienced in private worship or by watching worship. There are some graces and blessings that God gives only in the ‘meeting together’ with other believers.”¹

¹ Don Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 92.

- “The purpose of a church service is to edify and equip the saints as they join together in corporate worship through congregational singing, prayer, the teaching of God’s Word, and the observance of the ordinances.”²
- Ultimately, we worship the Lord in whatever we do (Romans 12:1-2) and worship him individually as well as corporately (John 4:23-24; 1 Cor 10:31).

Working Purpose Statement of our Worship Services: When we weekly gather together according to the Word of God, we aim to vertically worship and grow in spiritual wisdom and knowledge of God and horizontally encourage, equip and edify one another, by the power of the Spirit who sanctifies, to the praise of the glory of the risen Christ, and for the bold gospel witness as we scatter, until the Lord returns.

Liturgy: How We Gather

- Maranatha is not a “liturgical church,” with predetermined orders, readings, responses, and prayers. Yet all churches have a pattern or schedule or order of service.
- “While some churches are labeled as “liturgical” because of their very formal and predetermined order and manner of worship, all churches to some degree have a format that they typically follow.”³
- Patterns aren’t bad, but we should be cautious about making the predetermined order of a service the point, rather than the worship.
- Even non-liturgical churches can fall into patterns where repetition becomes the same danger of singing, praying, reading, or gathering in a way that becomes rote, dutiful, or glib in our hearts.
- We should NOT take out items that the Bible clearly teaches we should include.
 - The opposite would be the principle of **normative** worship: “anything not expressly forbidden by Scripture can be used in corporate worship.”⁴
- We should be CAUTIOUS to add items that the Bible does not include.
 - This follows a **regulative** principle of worship (no musical instruments, pulpits, stage)
 - Both principles have value, but there is no mandate against items that aid our worship.
- We should also consider LEARNING from churches in other places and cultures that follow the Biblical teaching on what to include, though perhaps in a different manner for the right reasons.

² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 776.

³ What does the Bible say about liturgy?, <https://www.gotquestions.org/liturgy-liturgical.html>

⁴ Regulative vs. normative principle of worship—which viewpoint is correct?, <https://www.gotquestions.org/regulative-normative-worship.html>

- It seems that the what matters, but also the how. Our gathering should be **edifying** and **orderly**.

1 Corinthians 14:26 ~ “What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”

1 Corinthians 14:33 ~ “...for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”

1 Corinthians 14:40 ~ But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.”

PRELUDE:

- We set the tone and atmosphere for the environment where we give our thoughts and attention to the God.
- People may be coming from all kinds of situations. Joy, sorrow, confusion, conflict, celebration... The prelude uses music to prepare our hearts and minds for the specific purpose for which we gather.
- This time before the service may be used to greet one another, serve, prepare to serve, pray, turn off phones and prepare children, read a portion of Scripture to rid ourselves of some distraction or confess of some known sin before focusing on our Great God.
- Completing the daily wordle, College football talk, or scrolling Facebook before the service will not help you prepare your mind to corporately worship.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Hebrews 12:28-29 ~ “let us be thankful, and so worship God **acceptably with reverence and awe.**”

Psalm 95:1 ~ “O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord,

Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation.”

- It is a call to gather...together, to use song, from our inner being, to praise Yahweh, in truth.
- The call is to **bring us together** from our individual lives, in person.
- The call is to **awaken** us and **enliven us** to the weight of glory of our God.
- The call is to **bring attention** to the purpose of these gatherings, namely true worship of God.

Psalm 29:2 ~ “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name; Worship the Lord in holy array.”

- The call is an invitation to “**Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.**” (Psalm 95:6)

What it DOES do

- The Call to Worship **summons** all Christians to come and worship together in one accord.
- It should **include the nature of work of God** that brings our hearts in line with truth.
- It should **provoke** us to shift our minds off ourselves and onto the God and serving His people.
- It should **invoke** us to humility and reverence, and **embolden** us to proclaim His Excellencies.
- The call **communicates** that together we will consecrate this time aside for this purpose.

What it DOES NOT do

- It does not invite God to come. He is already in our presence and quite aware of our gathering.
- It does not purify the church before the service.
- It does not emotionally charge up each person to “get their game face on”.
- It also does not mean we should cease worshiping or being in fellowship when the service ends.

BENEDICTION AT THE END OF THE SERVICE

- A benediction is simply scripture to end the service, usually a blessing upon the people to go from the gathering with God’s favor or blessing.
- These words of Scripture, such as “The Lord bless you and keep you...” (Numbers 6:22-27) are not magical or bestow special grace upon people more than the rest of the truth they received.
- It is simply a way to give our people the focus and concentration to go from here with our hearts and minds fixed on God.
- Great benedictions focus on God’s glory, the church’s dependance on Him for daily grace, and the confidence that He will do what He has promised- forever! Amen!

Ephesians 3:20-21 ~ “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

APPENDIX: HIGH CHURCH AND LOW CHURCH

- High Church and Low Church are references to the emphasis churches (especially in line with denominations) place on ritual, liturgy, and religious accessories in corporate worship.
- High Churches emphasize ceremony, vestments, sacraments, readings, rituals, special clothing, and following an annual calendar of religious observations.
- High Churches are Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, most Methodist, Lutheran, and some Presbyterian denominations.
- Low Churches take a more relaxed, free style of worship when gathering, and have a lower emphasis on the forms and ceremonial events listed above.
- Low Churches do not necessarily lack formalities or schedules, but are not as strict in their procedures and proceedings in a worship service. But they do have simpler forms of structure in worship, and hierarchy in the church.
- Low Churches are Baptist, Independent, Pentecostal, Quaker, Amish, some Methodist, Lutheran and Presbyterian.
- High/Low Church came about especially in response to the Reformation and what truly mattered to the church.
- “As the Protestant Church rejected Roman Catholic doctrine, how much Catholic procedure should be retained?”⁵
- “Low Church members often accuse the High Church of being “too Catholic.” High Church members sometimes look down their noses at the Low Church for being “unsophisticated.” Both sides should guard against spiritual pride ([James 4:6](#)). In truth, neither being High Church nor Low Church guarantees the proper worship of God. “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” ([John 4:24](#)).”⁶
- Maranatha is certainly a “Low Church” in form, with a very high view of Worship toward our Great God!
- We want to give all glory due His name in an orderly fashion (1 Cor 14:40), yet without ritual or pretense (Psalm 51:16-17)

⁵ <https://www.gotquestions.org/high-church-low-church.html>

⁶ Ibid.