

Creating Great Moments in Worship

By Jamie Harvill

Great worship moments rarely happen on their own – although God is very capable of bringing them about without our help! Some worship leaders think it's more spiritual when less planning is involved. My humble opinion is that God can work in advance, too; He can anoint, inspire and guide in the planning of a service a month away. And why wouldn't He? We don't wait to plan for a Thanksgiving feast on the day before; we spend time in advance thinking about the menu, the people we invite, and the setting in which it will be served.

Great moments in worship are like this, and we have a better chance of reaching our goal if we spend time praying, thinking about, and designing a plan. God already has one – we just need to seek and discover it. In planning for a service, I use five general guidelines:

1. Determining the Spiritual Statement begin made
2. Song Selection
3. Sequencing of the songs and spoken segments
4. Segues between each piece in the service
5. Sensitivity to people and, most importantly, to the Spirit

Spiritual Statement

Each church has a unique personality, and the songs used every week are a reflection of that individuality. As one considers the songs for a given week, we must consider the spiritual statement to be made in the service as a whole. Next, we must consider the season of the year and the appropriate songs to use. Other questions might be asked: is the pastor preaching on a special subject?; Is our church needing to focus on some specific scripture or topic?; is the audience going to be a of a certain age, or will it consist of mixed generations? Some generations outside of the main stream will probably feel left out at times, but the objective is to reach the greatest population.

Song Selection

As previously mentioned, the choice of certain songs is unique to each congregation. There are no right or wrong songs to use – just effective ones – those that foster great worship moments. Some songs are written “about” God and are filled with statements about His character, majesty, holiness, etc. (many hymns are written about God.) Other songs make statements “to” God, as if in a conversation.

Sequencing

My suggestion is to sequence the songs by placing the ones about God closer to the beginning of the service as the congregation is warming up to the room (they just dropped off their kids in the nursery and have totel them from the parking lot – so don't scorn them if it takes a few minutes for them to make the transition.) Save the conversation songs for later when a more intimate moment is desired. The start of a

service usually requires a faster tempo. Then, as service transitions into an introspective, more worshipful moment, slower tempos, are better suited.

The mental picture here is much like inviting people to your home: you greet them at the door and work your way inside. Everyone settles in, becoming relaxed as the evening progresses. Conversations usually become more personal as defenses fall and authentic communication can be accomplished.

Choosing the correct key for each song is imperative to creating a great moment in worship. Since the service is about everyone singing together, the congregation, needs to be able to sing the notes. Considering the vocal ranges of Mr. Smith, the baritone, to Mrs. Jones, the soprano, we must select keys that allow the melodies to stay within the congregational singing range. This range starts with B flat, below middle C, in the lowest register, to the D, an octave and a whole-step away from middle C, for the highest. The range is obviously limited because the general public aren't vocally trained as soloists. Stay within the congregational singing range as you choose songs. Maybe the keys you've been choosing are the reason your people don't sing!

Segues

Segues between moments are critical. Try to allow as little lag-time between each piece as possible. Even nano-seconds of "dead air" are distracting to great worship moments. Work out key changes by using the simple technique of going to the dominant chord of the new key, and using a suspended 4th in the first two beats of the bar, then resolving it on the last two beats. A tempo can also be changed as you ritard during the modulation. Keeping songs with related keys together, as well as modulating by half or whole steps, make for cleaner and better flowing transitions.

Sensitivity

I always make it a priority to be sensitive to those who are in the service each weekend. It is my goal that they "win" in worship; I want them to connect with God during that time. I try to remove any distractions that may inhibit that connection – be it physical, musical, or spiritual. I choose and arrange the songs with this in mind. Each stage movement is scrutinized, illuminating any impediment inhibiting a full focus on God during worship. The ultimate sensitivity, though, is toward God: He is the ultimate focal point and object of our adoration. Always be ready to make a change if God is leading in another direction. Our plans are just a flexible starting point in the large scheme of things.

Pray before you prepare. Think about these items I mentioned today. They aren't an exhaustive list, but are a great way to start the journey. Blessings to each of you as you prepare to lead your congregation toward the Throne of God each week.