

FIELD GUIDE

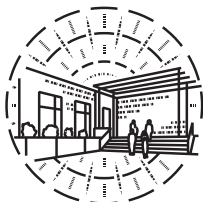
Corporate Worship



CHRIST COVENANT

Copyright © 2023 by Christ Covenant
Christ Covenant
221 Armour Dr. NE
Atlanta, GA 30324

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.



Corporate Worship

INTRODUCTION

We were born to worship, to join with all creation in declaring God’s praise (Ps. 150:6). Everything we do in this life should sing God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31). We are headed to an eternity of worship with a vast congregation from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev. 7:9–12). But our sinful nature constantly threatens to twist this inborn instinct to worship our Creator and Redeemer into the worship of just about anything else—money, prestige, sex, work, power, comfort—ultimately turning it in on ourselves, transforming the rushing river of living water intended to flow through our souls to the throne of Christ into a stagnant cesspool of selfish pride (see Rom. 1). What we worship drastically shapes our lives, our dreams, our schedules, our directions, and our emotions. Worship is powerful, and it’s something that we are susceptible to getting really wrong. But nothing is more beautiful and fulfilling than getting it right.

Worship is much more than singing a handful of songs on a Sunday. Even if we add Scripture reading, corporate prayer, preaching, and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper

to our understanding of worship, it's far more than that as well. Worship is all of life. But nothing better aims our worship toward its proper end than the time we spend worshiping together in corporate worship. Participating in each of the elements of our corporate worship together on Sundays contributes vitally to directing our heart, soul, and might to the love of God in all we do when we sit, walk, lie down, or rise for the rest of the week (Deut. 6:5–8).

PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

Corporate worship is so important that we should prepare for it. We stretch before we run and brush our teeth before we go to the dentist—shouldn't we also get our hearts ready for an encounter with the Ruler of the universe? These simple steps will help you get more out of our time worshiping together.

1. ***Read the sermon passage.*** Take time to read, reflect on, and pray through the upcoming week's passage so you are primed to draw greater insight from it during the sermon.
2. ***Listen to the songs.*** Christ Covenant has a Spotify playlist of songs we sing together on Sundays. Listening to these songs in the week ahead or on the way to church will help you better minister to others in the congregation in song (see #1 under The Elements of Worship for more on this).
3. ***Give yourself ample time to get to church.*** Rushing out the door in the morning (or the evening) can create conflicts and unneeded stress that distract from preparing for worship.
4. ***Bring a Bible and notebook.*** We are naturally distracted, and our constant entertainment culture can make focusing on Scripture readings and sermons difficult. Reading along in a Bible and taking notes during the sermon helps you actively engage your mind in what you are hearing.
5. ***Put away your phone.*** See #4 above.
6. ***Quiet your heart.*** As you commute to the building, take a moment to ask God to speak to you and use you to bless and encourage others. If you're commuting with your family, this

is a great opportunity to pray together. When you arrive at the worship service, please do greet others, but then take a moment when you get to your seat to quiet your heart, entrust those nagging anxieties to the God who cares for you and is greater than them all, and thank Him for the opportunity to enjoy His presence with His people.

THE ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP

Our corporate worship on Sundays involves several elements (for an overview, see Naethan Hendrix and Paul Abdallah’s article, “Defining the Stuff We Do On Sunday Mornings: A Congregational Worship Glossary,” on 9marks.org). Each one draws on a long tradition of Christian practice. We see in Acts 2:42 that the very earliest Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Each element of worship is purposefully designed to shape our souls into their created function as conduits for God’s glory. God describes His people in Isaiah 43:21 as those “I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.” In our worship, we encounter God. As we meet with Him, we speak to Him and hear His Word to us, all while encouraging one another.

1. ***Singing.*** Singing together as a congregation is a powerful way to express our hearts to God while allowing the setting of scriptural truth to music to move our souls toward our Savior. We come into the Lord’s presence singing His praises because of who He is and what He has done (Ps. 95:1–5). This is a collective act of worship in which we all participate, not a concert that we watch passively. We address one another “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19). In a sense, every Christian is called to be a worship leader. We are all called to edify and encourage those around us by singing truth wholeheartedly.
2. ***Scripture reading.*** As we speak to God and one another in our songs, so God speaks to us through His Word. Paul tells the young pastor, Timothy, “Devote yourself to the public

reading of Scripture” (1 Tim. 4:13). Collectively hearing God’s voice in Scripture can have a transformative effect on His people. For example, Nehemiah 8 tells how Ezra’s reading of Scripture to the people of Israel led them to weep in repentance. As Mark Dever says, “From Genesis to Revelation, God’s people have never created God’s Word. God’s Word has always created God’s people.”

3. **Prayer.** Like the Israelites in Nehemiah 8, we respond to God in prayer. What a privilege it is to communicate with the Creator and Redeemer of the world! In addition to praying our own individual prayers, Scripture encourages us to pray corporately, joining our prayers together. The Psalms are full of collective prayers in which we bring our praises, laments, petitions, and thanksgiving to God. The Lord’s Prayer, the exemplary prayer Jesus gives His disciples (Matt. 6:9–13), also uses corporate language (“Our Father... give us this day...”), though that doesn’t mean it can’t be used individually as well. Our worship services incorporate several types of prayers, including:
 - a. **Prayers of praise**, in which we praise God for who He is and what He has done (Eph. 1:3–14)
 - b. **Prayers of confession**, in which we seek forgiveness for our sins (1 John 1:9)
 - c. **Prayers of assurance**, in which we remind ourselves of the Lord’s sure promises, not only to forgive (1 John 1:9) but also to complete the work He has begun in us (Phil. 1:6)
 - d. **Prayers of thanksgiving**, in which we thank God for His mighty works on our behalf (Col. 3:15–17)
 - e. **Prayers of intercession**, in which we plead with God to carry out His redemptive purposes in our lives and the world (Matt. 6:10; 1 Tim. 2:1–6)
 - f. **Prayers of illumination**, in which we seek the Spirit’s help in understanding and being changed by His Word as it is declared to us (Ps. 119:18; 1 Cor. 2:12–16)
4. **Giving.** Each of us should give individually as we feel called by God. As Paul instructs, “Each one must give as he has decided in

“In the human-divine dialogue of worship, preaching is the primary means through which the Lord speaks to us as God’s Word is explained and applied to God’s people.”

his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). However, we incorporate individual giving into our collective worship to remind ourselves that our gifts are offerings—acts of worship to God—motivated by our gratitude for His generous grace and intended for the support of His church, both in Atlanta and across the globe. As Paul goes on to write, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, ‘He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever’” (2 Cor. 9:8–9).

5. **Preaching.** In the human-divine dialogue of worship, preaching is the primary means through which the Lord speaks to us as God’s Word is explained and applied to God’s people. Following the reading of Scripture in Nehemiah 8, we’re told that the Levites “gave the sense” of the text so that people understood it. This is what preachers continue to do today. Paul instructs Timothy to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:1–2). In the Great Commission, when Jesus sends His disciples out into the world, He commands them to make new disciples of all nations, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20). Preaching helps

fulfill this grand purpose.

6. **Baptism.** In the Great Commission, Jesus also commands His disciples to baptize the new disciples they will make in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Baptism is one of two church ordinances that Christ explicitly commands the church to practice. Baptism signifies the unity of a believer in Christ's death and resurrection through faith (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). Because baptism is a public profession of faith, before their baptism, people at our church share the story of how they met Jesus and experienced His transformative power in their lives.
7. **The Lord's Supper.** Also known as communion, the Lord's Supper is the second church ordinance. As baptism celebrates the entry of a believer in Christ into His body, the church, the Lord's Supper celebrates our continued participation in that body together. As Paul writes, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). On the night before He was crucified, Jesus instituted the practice of eating bread and drinking wine as a symbol of our absolute dependence on His sacrifice of His body (the bread) and blood (the wine) for our salvation (Matt. 26:26–29; Luke 22:14–23; 1 Cor. 11:23–26). Because the Lord's Supper is a symbol of our common dependence on Christ's sacrifice, Scripture encourages us to approach it with proper reverence, first confessing our sins to Christ and one another (1 Cor. 11:27–32).
8. **Fellowship.** We don't often think of the time we spend shaking hands and giving hugs before, after, or even during a service in a time of greeting as part of worship, but fellowship is mentioned as one of the four practices of those earliest Christians in Acts 2:42. Everything else we do in worship means even more if we know the people worshiping with us. It's even more encouraging to hear the woman in the row behind us sing "It Is Well With My Soul" if we've prayed for her to find comfort after the death of her father or to see the young men in the row ahead of us listening attentively to

the sermon if we know one has been sharing the gospel with the other at work. The church has sometimes been called a “mutual-assurance-of-salvation society,” as getting to know others gives us the opportunity to see evidence of the Spirit’s work in each other’s lives and to hold each other accountable when our actions indicate that we are drifting from our faith. Our fellowship is also a powerful witness to a watching world. As Jesus says, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

By preparing for, better understanding, and fully participating in corporate worship, we fuel our souls each Sunday to delight in the Lord all week. And as Sunday builds upon Sunday, we prepare ourselves for heaven, where “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” will join together to worship our Redeemer, declaring, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev. 7:9–10).





CHRIST COVENANT