

# WHY DO WE WORSHIP THE WAY WE DO?

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## GRACE PRESBYTERIAN (PCA) WORSHIP GUIDE

At Grace, our worship is God-centered, Christ-centered and regulated by the Scriptures. God desires and enables his people to worship Him. Therefore, the way we worship God, matters to God. As Terry Johnson said, “The Reformers and Puritans believed that how we worship is just as important as how we are saved.”<sup>1</sup>

Our worship is committed to three core values: Holiness, Obedience, and Joy. These fundamental values are expressed through our Liturgy, Preaching, and Music.

### GOSPEL-SHAPED LITURGY

***In worship, we draw near to the Triune, Holy God of Scripture.*** Our order of service, or liturgy, consists of a dramatic dialogue between God and His people. As God’s people we reverently and joyfully renew our covenant bonds with Christ in our worship service. This understanding of worship reflects our historic Reformed traditions, which drew upon the biblical record of people who encountered God.<sup>2</sup>

Of great significance is Isaiah 6, which records Isaiah being brought face to face with God in all His glory. This scene of worship includes angels proclaiming God’s holiness, the foundations of the Temple being shaken, and Isaiah’s awareness of the depths of his own sin. During this dramatic scene of worship, Isaiah’s sinfulness is met with a remarkable display of God’s grace—his sin is forgiven, and Isaiah enters communion with God.

In Isaiah 6, God gives His people an outline for how He desires to be worshipped. This God-given outline consistently appears in Scripture. For instance, it appears in Israel’s worship at Mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 5) and the Dedication of the Jerusalem Temple (2 Chronicles 5-7). These general principles of worship continue in the New Testament. In the New Testament, we find that worship continues to involve preaching, prayer, singing, and the reading of Scripture. Christian worship also includes the observance of the sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism. These elements became the foundation of Christian worship with the end of the Old Testament sacrificial system.<sup>3</sup> It is of no coincidence that these patterns of encountering God reflect “the progress of the gospel in the heart.”<sup>4</sup>

***The elements of our worship are generally structured into five cycles (or sequences): Preparation, Praise, Confession, Employing the Means of Grace, and Thanksgiving and Blessing.***<sup>5</sup> Using Isaiah 6 as an outline, each of the cycles is identified and explained in our order of worship at Grace.

#### ***CYCLE OF PREPARATION***

Isaiah 6:1. Isaiah’s vision begins as he sees the Lord “high and lifted up.” Isaiah’s encounter transcends the earthly. The worship that unfolds begins with the majestic and holy nature of God.<sup>6</sup>

***The Instrumental Prelude & Processional*** – At Grace our worship begins with preparation. A hymn such as “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” or “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” allows us to turn our hearts and minds to the excellence and greatness of God. We prepare ourselves to come before Him as the gathered church in Christ.

***The Choral Introit*** – The choir calls us into the presence of God, pointing us to the transcendent qualities of our Triune God.<sup>7</sup>

### ***CYCLE OF PRAISE***

Isaiah 6:2-4. Angelic creatures proclaim, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” No other attribute of God in Scripture is raised to such a degree. Their cry resonates with the cry of the four living creatures in Revelation 4, who ceaselessly proclaim His holiness.

***The Call to Worship*** – emphatically announces God’s attributes and works and encourages appropriate responses of reverence, awe, and praise.

***The Prayer of Invocation*** – humbly invites God the Holy Spirit to fill our sanctuary and lives—that God Himself would do the work of worship through us, and so greatly glorify Himself.

***The Hymn of Praise*** – We sing praise to God in response to Who He is and all He has done.

***The Profession of Faith*** – honors God by proclaiming the nature of the Trinity and centers on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ—his incarnation, life, death and resurrection, and victory over sin and death.

***The Hymn of Affirmation*** – We sing praise to God in response to the central truths of the faith proclaimed in the profession of faith.

### ***CYCLE OF CONFESSION***

Isaiah 6:5-7. Isaiah agonizes over the vivid contrast between God’s majestic holiness and his own sinfulness. Having seen God, he is fear-stricken and anticipating death. Isaiah says, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. . . .” John MacArthur notes, “If the lips are unclean, so is the heart.”<sup>8</sup> In verses 6-7, God chooses to exercise His matchless grace and restores Isaiah.<sup>9</sup>

***The Scripture Reading*** – teaches us about God’s holiness and His standards for righteousness. The Scriptures call us to the essentials for living as a part of His eternal kingdom. (See also Matthew 6:33.)

***The Confession of Sin*** – begins corporately and leads to silent and individual confession. Johnson notes, “The prayers of confession from the historic [Reformed] liturgies . . . are profoundly deep and thorough, confessing thoughts, words and deeds, evils done, good left undone, sins of ignorance, of weakness, and those committed with deliberation. Special attention is given to heart sins: pride, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, covetousness, hatred, lust.”<sup>10</sup>

**The Pastoral Prayer** – petitions God on behalf of the congregation and community, worldwide church, nation and world, including urgent needs, situational, physical, and spiritual.

**The Lord's Prayer** – a corporate prayer of profound simplicity, as Christ intended this as model for our own prayer.

**The Gospel's Assurance of Grace** – employs one of the Scriptural assurances of forgiveness offered in the gospel, such as Romans 8:15-17 or 1 John 1:8-10.

**The Hymn of Preparation** – we sing in response to the gospel's assurance of grace and in spiritual preparation for the sermon.

### ***CYCLE OF EMPLOYING THE MEANS OF GRACE***

Isaiah 6: 8-13. Upon this purifying work of God, the prophet's relationship with Him is so fully restored that he hears the voice of the Lord and is freed to engage in dialogue with Him.<sup>11</sup> God calls Isaiah to service, gives him instruction, and sends him to do His will. In verse 13, God affirms His covenant promise to Israel.<sup>12</sup>

**The Sacrament of Baptism (occasional Sundays)** – “a sign and seal of the covenant of grace.”<sup>13</sup> Infants or children who are baptized must one day come to repentance and faith for salvation before becoming communicant members at Grace PCA.

**The Scripture Reading** – brings us the sermon Scripture for the day.

**The Prayer of Illumination** – asks that God would reveal the truth of Scripture through preaching unhindered by the weakness of the one speaking.

**The Sermon** – expository preaching from the Bible, God's holy and inerrant Word.

**The Prayer of Intercession** – asks that God would enable us to apply His word to our hearts, resulting in changed lives (James 1:22).

**The Lord's Supper (1st Sunday of Month)** – a sacred meal only to be taken according to the stipulations outlined in holy Scripture and presented by the presiding elder. The supper's rich significance is explained in Chapter 29 of the Westminster Confession of Faith.<sup>14</sup>

*“I. Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein he was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of his body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in his church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death; the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto him; and, to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body.”<sup>15</sup>*

*“VII. Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.”<sup>16</sup>*

## ***CYCLE OF THANKSGIVING AND BLESSING***

**The Benediction** – Literally meaning “good word,” this is a blessing from God’s Word pronounced upon the congregation.

**The Doxology** – We close the service singing and exhorting the praise of all God’s creatures, heavenly and earthly unto the Triune God—the fountain of all blessing.

## **EXPOSITORY PREACHING**

Expository preaching seeks to explain the actual meaning of the Scriptures. This book-by-book and verse-by-verse preaching maintains the proper context in which a verse should be understood. Expository preaching also involves the original languages, the author and audience, the background, and the theology of a biblical book. Expository preaching is evident in both the Old and New Testaments (Nehemiah 8:8-13, Luke 4:16-21, Acts 13:15).<sup>17</sup>

The Reformers recovered expository preaching through studying the sermons of early church fathers such as Origen, Chrysostom, and Augustine, and its practice has continued into the modern era through such notable preachers as John McArthur, James M. Boice, and Sinclair Ferguson among many others.<sup>18</sup>

## **GOD-CENTERED MUSIC**

The goal of God-centered worship is to glorify God. Focusing on our Lord Jesus Christ, we seek to be more Christlike. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says; “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” When we engage the holiness and majesty of God through our worship music, we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, who is making us more like Christ.

Scripture and creation attest to the God of truth, goodness, and beauty. He is the source and perfection of these virtues.<sup>19</sup> Our worship music expresses these out of reverence, awe, and love for Him<sup>20</sup> (Philippians 4:8, Colossians 3, Hebrews 12:28, Mark 12:30, Psalms 96 and 100). Hence, we seek to offer the very best music past and present—in service unto God.

Singing is emphasized, as by this we demonstrate the filling of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-21) and thankful hearts that let the Word dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16-17).

Texts for worship music should be theologically strong, and music should provide an excellent marriage with the text. Instrumental and vocal music are chosen to work harmoniously with the liturgical flow and with sermon content.

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<sup>1</sup> Terry L. Johnson, *Reformed Worship: Worship That is According to Scripture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Jackson: Reformed Academic Press, 2010), back cover.

<sup>2</sup> Terry L. Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin: Recovering the Historic Ministry and Worship of Reformed Protestantism* (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2014), 223-24.

<sup>3</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 102-08.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 99. Chapell's book makes it clear that the historic Christian liturgies of Rome, Luther, Calvin, and Westminster each exhibit a structure that "reflects the pattern of the progress of the gospel in the heart." He states this structure or pattern is as follows: Adoration, Confession, Assurance, Thanksgiving, Petition, Instruction, Charge and Blessing. Chapell then demonstrates in the very next chapter that such patterns of worship are seen in Scripture. He says of these, ". . . where God intentionally provides models, they consistently echo the gospel pattern the church will later practice."

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin*, 222-24.

<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), 756 -66.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal*. (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing Company, 1993), 422. Hustad describes the extraordinary sound of choral music and its function in worship.

<sup>8</sup> MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 766. MacArthur cites Job 42:6 and Luke 5:8 for similar responses and cross references Ezekiel 1:28-2:7 and Revelation 1:17.

<sup>9</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Cambridge: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 84. Oswalt comments, "God does not reveal himself to destroy us, but rather to redeem us (so with Jacob in Gen. 32, and with the Israelites in Exod. 19-24)."

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin*, 227.

<sup>11</sup> J. Alec Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 78.

<sup>12</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 190-191.

<sup>13</sup> "The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms: As Adopted by The Presbyterian Church in America" [online]. Accessed June 5, 2025. Available from <https://www.pcaac.org/bco/westminster-confession/>; Internet. See WCF 28.1.

<sup>14</sup> "The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms: As Adopted by The Presbyterian Church in America" [online]. Accessed June 5, 2025. Available from <https://www.pcaac.org/bco/westminster-confession/>; Internet.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.1

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.7

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin*, 99-106.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-106.

<sup>19</sup> R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ed. (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2010), 238-39. Sproul writes of the *three-legged stool* of truth, goodness, and beauty. He elaborates, "In biblical categories, there is a triad of virtues, all of which point beyond themselves to the holiness of God. This triad is composed of the *good*, the *true*, and the *beautiful*."

<sup>20</sup> Kevin T. Bauder et al., *A Conservative Christian Declaration*, (Religious Affections Ministries, 2014), 26-28, 30-33, 38-42, and 70-72.