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PRIORITIES IN PLANNING YOUR MEETING

I. Introduction

- A. The conviction that Christians should gather weekly is almost universally taught and practiced in the church. But what Christians should DO when they gather is another story entirely.
- B. Various factors influence our decisions.
 - 1. Scripture
 - 2. Traditions
 - 3. Experiences
 - 4. Culture
- C. There is a strong connection in Scripture between God-glorifying public gatherings and the spiritual health of God's people (2 Chron. 29-32; 2 Chron. 34-35)

II. The Significance of Our Gatherings

- A. Liturgy *models*

You can tell a lot about people's theology from what they do in church. (Carl Trueman, *Fools Rush in Where Monkeys Fear to Tread*, 57)
- B. Liturgy *teaches*
- C. Liturgy *shapes and influences*

As we plan and order our services, discerning the content to include, we shape the beliefs and devotional lives of our church members. (Mike Cospers, *Rhythms of Grace*, 118)

III. The Substance of Our Gatherings

- A. The Word
- B. The Gospel
- C. Edification

IV. The Structure of Our Gatherings

God gathers his people to himself as an act of grace. So when we come together, our intentions and actions need to be shaped by God's purpose in drawing us together. Every time we meet, we need to be reminded of the basis of our relationship with God and with one another. Every gathering should be gospel-shaped. (David Peterson, *Encountering God Together*, 21).

A. Elements

1. Preaching (2Tim. 4:2; Rom. 10:14-17)
2. Scripture Reading (1Tim. 4:13)
3. Singing (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19)
4. Prayer (1Tim. 2:1-2)
5. The Lord's Supper (1Cor. 11:23-26)
6. Baptism (Mt. 28:19-20)
7. Financial giving (1Cor. 16:1-2)
8. Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor. 12 & 14; 1 Thess. 5:19-21)
9. Confessions of Faith (2 Cor. 9:13; Heb. 4:14, 10:23)
10. Greeting (Phil. 4:21-22)
11. Announcements, testimonies, baby dedications, etc.

B. Order

Worship cannot simply be a matter of arbitrary choice, church tradition, personal preference, or cultural appeal. There are foundational truths in the gospel of Christ's redeeming work that do not change if the gospel is to remain the gospel. So, if our worship structures are to tell this story consistently, then there must be certain aspects of our worship that remain consistent. (Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 85)

We should not ignore the wisdom of church forebears just because it's old, or automatically reject it just because we didn't think of it. We consider the history because God does not give all of his wisdom to any one time or people. (Chapell, 16)

One suggestion (based on the list in *Christ-Centered Worship*)

1. Adoration of God's greatness
2. Acknowledgement of our sin
3. Assurance of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ
4. Gratefulness for God's provision
5. Requests and intercession (lament can be included here)
6. Proclamation of God's Word
7. Communion
8. Charge and Blessing

This order reflects numerous Old Testament encounters with God and New Testament letters. More simply put we order our meetings to reflect:

1. God's Glory
2. God's Grace
3. Our Response

- C. Case Study: What we do at Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville.

V. Values to Cultivate

A. God's Word

1. Read the Bible (1 Tim. 4:13)
2. Preach the Bible (2 Tim. 4:1)
3. Pray the Bible (Psalms, 1 Tim. 2:1-2)
4. Sing the Bible (Col. 3:16)
5. See the Bible (1 Cor. 11:23-26; Mt. 28:18-20)

After the right preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments is what most visibly marks out the church from the world.

6. Obey the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16; Ps. 19:7-11)

B. The gospel.

1. A clear presentation of it
2. A compelling passion for it
3. A consistent application of it

C. Repetition.

When there are well established procedures with which everyone is familiar, it makes it easier to concentrate on the content rather than the outward form. (Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship Reformed According to Scripture*, 165)

Forms are a means to an end; if they are constantly changing, they obscure the end rather than lead to it. (Old, 165)

D. Variety.

We can obscure the truth of the gospel through embellishment. We can obscure the beauty of the gospel through reactionary starkness.

E. Progression.

Every meeting tells a story. Sometimes the story is confusing, or the wrong one.

- Buffet vs. a five course meal
- Twitter feed vs. a story
- An album vs. iPod shuffle

F. Explanations.

1. Explain what people might not know or bring theological weight to words and actions that people might miss.

Today, in an age that seeks to simplify everything—songs, sermons, readings, and ritual of the service—the clear and powerful proclamation of sound biblical doctrine and practice in

every part of the service will give spiritual depth to worship and demonstrate the vitality of the faith in the lives of the worshippers. (Allen Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, p. 506)

2. Transitions
 3. What you're doing
 4. Watch your time.
- G. What's yet to come

If we even begin to comprehend the risen Christ in all his glory, or faintly hear the heavenly choirs that surround the throne with their anthems of praise, or imagine what life in the presence of the Lord will be like, then we can never again be satisfied with worship as usual. We will always be striving to make our worship fit for glory; and we will always be aware that our efforts, no matter how good and noble, are still of this world and not yet of that one. (Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*, 474).

VI. **Five Effects of a Well-Planned Gospel-Informed Gathering**

- A. Exaltation – God's glory in the gospel should be elevated in our minds and hearts (Ps. 34:1-3; 2 Cor. 4:6)
- B. Edification – God's people should be built up in the gospel (1 Cor. 14:12; Col. 2:6-7; Eph. 4:15-16)
- C. Exhortation – God's people should be stirred up to good works in response to and empowered by the gospel (Heb. 10:19-25)
- D. Encounter – God's presence should be acknowledged and experienced as a primary benefit of the gospel (1 Cor. 14:24-25; Heb. 12:22-24; Heb. 10:19-23)
- E. Evangelism – unbelievers should be able to hear the gospel (1 Cor. 14:24-25)

VII. **Recommended Books**

- *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice*, Bryan Chapell
- *Encountering God Together: Biblical Patterns for Ministry and Worship*, David Peterson
- *Engaging with God*, David Peterson
- *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel*, Mike Cosper
- *The Deliberate Church*, Mark Dever and Paul Alexander
- *Worship By the Book*, D.A. Carson, editor