

THEOLOGY OF

Gather

MISSION

**We exist to glorify God as gospel-centered disciples who...
Gather, Grow, Give, & Go**

FRAMEWORK

**We GATHER to...
Exalt and Enjoy God
Edify and Equip the Found
Engage and Evangelize the Lost**

WHY WE GATHER?

**ONE Object of Worship – The Triune God
TWO Contexts for Worship – Gathered and Scattered
THREE Audiences in Worship – The Triune God, The Found, The Lost**

In light of Scripture, our worship gatherings are to be God-centered (Psalm 150:1-6; Colossians 3:16-17; Hebrews 13:15-16), believer-focused (1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 26-33; Ephesians 4:11-16), and seeker-sensitive (1 Corinthians 14:16-17, 23-25; Romans 10:9-17).

GOD'S ROLE VS. OUR ROLE

In Scripture, we are given very clear parameters around what is our role and what is God's role when it comes to a gospel response. In Matthew 13:1-23, Jesus tells a parable explaining that we, as sowers, are called to scatter gospel seeds but that, ultimately, we have no control over the condition of each listener's heart (ground/soil). We learn in this parable that each soil or heart will respond radically differently to the seeds of the gospel. Then, in 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, the Apostle Paul takes it a step further and teaches us that we as disciples are called to plant seeds and water them, but that ultimately, only God can provide the growth. In light of these two passages, we are called as followers of Christ to generously scatter, plant, and water gospel seeds in all of life in general and in our Sunday gatherings in particular. But biblically speaking, we have no say over the ground of their hearts or the growth of the seeds. So, in summary, we believe that faithfully and generously scattering gospel seeds falls on us (Ezekiel 3:16-21; Romans 10:9-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18), but ultimately the ground and the growth fall on God (John 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7).

CATALYTIC VS. CUMULATIVE

In our worship gatherings, we take a cumulative approach to spiritual transformation, not a catalytic one. Even though we believe the Spirit of God can still move in catalytic ways, the catalytic events tend to be the exception rather than the rule. We believe there are certain times when the Spirit of God catalytically turns on the light switch in a particular area of a person's life, but more often than not, the Spirit of God cumulatively adjusts the dimmer switch in that particular area over time. There are times when God brings a catalytic breakthrough by tearing down a stronghold wall all at once, but oftentimes, the breakthrough tends to be more cumulative, as He breaks down the wall by removing one brick at a time. In Scripture, the moment of salvation tends to be catalytic (John 3:1-17, 6:44-47; Acts 16:14-15, 30-33; Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Peter 2:9-10), while the process of sanctification

tends to be cumulative (John 17:17-19; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). In light of this reality, we pray for and celebrate catalytic moments in our worship services while at the same time understanding that most of the impact will be cumulative. We measure this cumulative growth in the life of a disciple over time by using metrics that we find in Scripture, like gospel faith (John 3:16; Romans 10:9; 2 Corinthians 5:7), fruit (Matthew 5:1-11; Galatians 5:22-23; John 15:5), fluency (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6), freedom (Galatians 2:20, 5:1; John 8:32, 1 Peter 2:16), and fellowship (Hebrews 10:19-25; 1 John 1:5-7). Also, we measure cumulative growth in the life of a disciple through the lens of Matthew 4:19. As a result, we celebrate when we see a disciple more effectively following Jesus, being formed by Jesus, and fishing for Jesus.

CONCERT HALL VS. BANQUET HALL

Biblically speaking, the context for our worship gathering is not a concert hall but a banquet hall. In a concert hall, a participant shows up as a consumer to be entertained and to have an experience. Their focus is primarily on having their own needs met. In a banquet hall, the participant shows up not as a self-centered consumer but as an others-centered contributor. The goal in a banquet hall is to eat together, to have fellowship with one another, and to serve each other (Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 5:18-20; Hebrews 10:19-25, 12:28-29). In order to produce a banquet hall environment during our worship gatherings, we intentionally call attendees to actively participate in the service through singing, giving, partaking of the elements, praying, actively listening during the sermon, and responding to the gospel.

SHARING VS. SELLING

In Scripture, we see that conversion is ultimately a work that God accomplishes when He gives us new hearts that enable us to repent and believe the gospel with saving faith (Ezekiel 36:25-27; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7). In light of that doctrinal reality, we are called to urgently share with sinners to repent and believe the genuine gospel, but not to manipulatively sell them on a counterfeit gospel. The true gospel is not ultimately about Jesus meeting our felt needs (purpose, happy life, fulfillment) but about His meeting our ultimate need (our separation from God because of sin). Author Michael Lawrence puts it this way, “The heart of the gospel is that Jesus died and rose again as a substitute for sinners, appeasing God’s just wrath and reconciling us to himself. When we advertise the felt-need benefits of the gospel and neglect the core content of the gospel, we’re not doing biblical evangelism, but something less. Who doesn’t want peace, contentment, and a better family life? It doesn’t take the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit to say yes to that offer.” Because of this reality, in our gatherings, we communicate the gospel plainly (1 Corinthians 1:17-18; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6), urgently (2 Corinthians 5:20-21, 6:1-2), and confidently (Romans 1:16-17; 2 Corinthians 4:5-7). In our worship gatherings, we do these things understanding that our hope is not ultimately in our methods but in our message. So, to make sure that people truly understand the content of the gospel and the cost of discipleship, our consistent call to action is for them to have further conversations, not to make a feelings-based decision. Taking this approach might result in a lower overall quantity of responses, but it elevates the overall quality of responses.

ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP

Our worship gatherings are centered around the Word of God (the Bible) and the Work of God (the Gospel). When it comes to these two elements, we sing them, pray them, preach them, remember them, praise God for them, etc. In our gatherings, we intentionally take a revelation/response approach to worship. In other words, we do not expect a response from our congregants unless we have first given them a revelation from God in the form of either His Word or Work. Throughout the service, we intentionally emphasize the Work of God by specifically focusing on the different aspects of the gospel story (Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation). In a worship gathering, we: preach the Word (Acts 20:7; 2 Timothy 3:16, 4:2), read the Word (Colossians 4:16), pray to God (1 Corinthians 14:15-16; Hebrews 12:28-29), sing to God (Ephesians 5:18-21; Colossians 3:16), take communion (1 Corinthians 11:25-26),

celebrate baptism (Acts 2:37-41), and receive an offering (1 Corinthians 16:1-2, 2 Corinthians 9:7).

RESOURCES

- *Conversion: How God Creates a People* by Michael Lawrence
- *Corporate Worship: How the Church Gathers as God's People* by Matt Merker
- *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* by Mike Cospers
- *True Worshippers: Seeking What Matters to God* by Bob Kauflin