



VILLAGE CHURCH

of EAST ATLANTA

Worship 101

Why we do what we do in worship.

Worship 101

Welcome!

This booklet is here to help enhance your experience of worship at Village Church. Many of us come from diverse backgrounds, faith traditions, and worship experiences, so we do not expect everyone to be familiar with the way we do things. So please feel free to read the explanations in this booklet, ask any questions you may have, and if you'd like, take this booklet home with you.

Your Prerogatives

1. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. Of course, be considerate of the group – no spontaneous tambourining during the sermon please – but feel free to sit when others stand, be silent, drink coffee, etc. (a hearty “Amen!” is always welcome, too).
2. You don't have to say or sing anything you don't believe. In fact, you shouldn't. There's enough hypocrisy in the church already.
3. You have the right to ask questions. In fact, if you think faith matters at all, you should. It also helps others learn how they're being heard, what's missing, and what might be wrong. So please write something on a comment card and drop it in the offering basket when it comes by, talk to one of the regulars, or to Matt, our pastor.

Kids in the Service

We believe that teaching our kids how to worship as an integral part of the community of faith is as important as teaching them how to read, write, count, or tie their shoes! Too often we segregate our community based on age, stage, or preference and we lose the richness of a fully diversified community! The young need the old and vice versa. To this end we keep all our kids in the worship service up until the sermon, at which time kids up to four years old may go to nursery or Sunday school. For kids over 4 we provide Children's Worship Guides to encourage them to pay attention

during the sermon. We know that this isn't always conducive to a "peaceful" worship experience, but we believe that teaching our kids the rhythms of worship, the songs and creeds of the faith, the prayers of the saints, and the preaching of the gospel all outweigh the adjustments we as adults have to make. Please feel free to ask Matt (the pastor) or Denise (our children's ministry director) for more information.

Things We Do in Worship

Call to Worship. Churches have begun their services this way for centuries as a way of making a clear transition from everyday life (which can also be a form of worship) to the special actions of worshiping God together. We'll often use Bible verses, especially from the Psalms, to set the tone for this transition.

Invocation. Literally "calling in," this is an opening prayer to ask God to help us worship through the presence of his Holy Spirit. Of course God is everywhere, but the Bible teaches that God likes to be specially present at certain times, especially when people gather together and ask him to be. Just as important, invocations identify God as the Christian Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It all acknowledges that without him, we can't even do church right!

Singing. Singing is an ancient way that groups in all cultures have communicated shared values and beliefs. Our culture doesn't sing together as much these days (we tend to listen to a lot of music instead), but it's still a powerful way to celebrate God's character and express our solidarity with each other – which what church is all about. In addition, music has a special power to communicate the beauty and order of God's world, while plowing life-giving words into our hearts and minds in a way that listening or reading alone can't do. So we sing with each other, but most importantly,

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we sing to God. And don't worry what you sound like – He gave you that voice!

Musical Styles. Musical tastes differ, and that's a good thing. Our ultimate desire is to reflect the musical tastes of our existing members while also directing us toward the diverse musical tastes of the people in East Atlanta. We also want to take advantage of the best Christian songs from the past and the present. This is a tough balance to achieve, and to the extent that we pull it off, everyone won't like every song. So if you don't like the styles you hear today, please be patient, and feel free to make a suggestion (per your prerogative #3).

Confession & Assurance of Pardon. Being a Christian starts with recognizing our sinfulness (heart-rebellion against God) and trusting that Christ has received our punishment instead. As we grow in our understanding of God's profound and complete forgiveness (grace), we also continue to confess our sinful attitudes, words and actions against him. It's hard to admit that we all still sin in various ways, but God delights in cleansing us and filling us with his Spirit to change. By citing a biblical "assurance of pardon" we remember that it is God alone – not a priest or a church – who grants us cosmic, irrevocable forgiveness.

Congregational Prayer. The Bible says that every church is like a body whose uniquely gifted "members" (body parts) all work together in interdependence and harmony. And so, in addition our private prayers, we pray during the service for each others' needs and struggles, for our mutual aspirations as a church, and for the peace and flourishing of our city, our nation, and our world. Whether you pray along with the one who prays, or just listen, the congregational prayer is a great way to learn what's important to a church.

Responsive Readings. Sometimes we have to say things out loud to remember them – and to hear others saying them, too. Since the Bible was made to be read as well as preached, some readings will be taken straight from scripture. Wise Christians have also summarized biblical truths in succinct and helpful ways. Often referred to as liturgy (“to praise”), we’ll use some of these, too. Reading responsively reminds us that the God who speaks to us invites us to dialogue with him in return.

Sermon. A central Christian belief is that in order for us to know who God is and what he wants for us, he has to tell us. That’s the premise behind the Bible: that God has both spoken and acted in history, and has authorized certain people to pass on what they’ve heard and seen in writing. No living preacher has this authority in himself, but insofar as he illuminates the words that God has already authorized, a sermon can become a fresh word from God to you. Some sermons achieve this better than others, so please let the preacher know what you heard or didn’t hear, and how he might communicate God’s words more effectively to everyone (See prerogative #3). Expect the sermon to last about 35 minutes – longer than some you may have heard, but far shorter than most in history.

Creeds. You may have heard the expressions, “No creed but Christ” or “No creed but the Bible.” We agree that Jesus and the Bible are more important than any creed, but everyone still has to decide: Which Jesus? and Which interpretation of the Bible? Unfortunately, there are a lot of conflicting answers to those questions. Because Village Church submits to a tradition of understanding Jesus and the Bible that stretches back to the very first churches, we use creeds that affirm what Christians have historically believed – including the Apostle’s Creed (circa 390 AD), the Nicene Creed (325 AD) and the Westminster Confession (1648 AD). Like singing, saying them together is a way of affirming shared beliefs – if you believe them, of course.

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The Lord's Supper. Also called Communion ("fellowship") or the Eucharist ("giving thanks"), this is one of the two sacraments, or sacred rituals, established by Jesus himself. By taking this "meal" together we remember the magnitude of Jesus' sacrifice for us, and by taking it with personal faith we re-encounter his love for us in a mystical, spiritual way. In the early church, communion was normally part of a larger meal with the whole church family (see 1 Corinthians 11), so it's appropriate to continue the feast with others after church in our homes or at restaurants. Therefore:

- If you believe that Jesus died and was raised to life for your sins, and if you are trusting in his sacrifice alone for your salvation, then you belong at the table with other sinners like us. Even if you're struggling with discouragement or doubt (which is always present with faith), taking the supper can be a tangible way of re-energizing your love for God by physically receiving his.
- If you are not sure where you stand with Jesus, or if you do believe in him but are consciously resisting his loving authority over your life in some way, please don't partake today. You can meditate or pray now (see Sample Prayers below), and you can return as often as you like until you know where you stand with him. Again, don't forget to exercise your Prerogative #3.

Baptism. The New Testament shows that when people put their faith in Christ, they get baptized – an ancient ritual that involves professing your faith publicly and getting wet. All Christians believe this, yet especially since the 16th-century Reformation, we have differed about what to do with the children of Christian parents. In our presbyterian tradition, we believe that baptism does not save these children, but it marks them as members of the community of faith, where they will be raised to embrace the faith for themselves as they grow up. So we baptize small children if at least one of their parents is a Christian. If you have more questions about this, please ask the pastor.

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Giving. Sadly, some Christian churches have used people's money for selfish and illegitimate ends. But others have used money for worthy purposes, including support for the pastor and paying for this building to meet in. We believe that giving is not only a practical necessity, but an act of worshiping God and contributing to the needs of others. Therefore:

- If you're visiting today, please feel no obligation to give. God will provide for his church, and we're happy to serve you without any cost.
- If you are committed to being an interdependent member of this body (see Congregational Prayer above), we encourage you to study the Bible's teaching on money and give freely and generously from the resources God has entrusted to you. Know too that we as a church are committed to passing on at least 10 percent of all congregational giving to other service organizations, ministries, and individuals in need.

Benediction. Another ancient Christian practice, benediction means "a good word," a blessing said by a pastor to the people on behalf of God. Benedictions remind us that a worship service is just a fraction of every week, after which we are "sent" (this is what the word "apostle" means) back into the world to serve him and love others. We often use benedictions taken from New Testament letters, and we invite everyone to keep their eyes open, open their hands, and receive this loving commission from God.

Sample Prayers

For those struggling with habitual sin: Lord Jesus, enable me to see in you the fulfillment of all my true needs, and may I turn from every false satisfaction to feed on you, the true and living bread. Enable me to lay aside the sin that clings so closely and run with perseverance the race set before me, looking to you, the pioneer and author of my faith. Amen.

For those searching for the truth: Lord Jesus, you claim to be the way, the truth, and the life. Grant that I might be undaunted by the cost of following you as I consider the reasons for doing so. If what you claim is true, please guide me, teach me, and open me to the reality of who you are. Give me an understanding of that is coherent, convincing, and that leads to the life that you promise. Amen.

For those ready to accept the Gospel: Lord Jesus Christ, I admit that I am weaker and more sinful than I ever dared admit, but through you I am more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope. I thank you for paying my debt on the cross, taking what I deserved in order to offer me complete forgiveness. Knowing that you have been-raised from the dead, I turn from my sins and receive you as my Savior and Lord. Amen.