



a guide to our worship





Think of the disciples on the road to Emmaus...

When they found themselves troubled and confused, Jesus met them along the way. When they confessed their troubles and doubts to him, his words and presence began to change them. He unfolded God's word to them, pointing to his own person and work. He dined with them, giving thanks and breaking bread. The disciples recognized their Lord's presence with them and hurried to tell others the good news.

We may fill in the details of this pattern various ways, but in the Emmaus story we can recognize the pattern of historic Christian worship as it began to take shape. It resonates over and over again with the shape of the biblical story, with the actions of our Triune God in the events of salvation history.

What Is Liturgy?

Our worship here at City Church is “liturgical.” But what does that mean?

The Greek word “*leitourgia*” means a public work, the work of the people. And that’s what liturgy is—the action of God’s gathered people, but only in response to his prior action of sending Jesus Christ for our salvation.

Liturgical worship begins with God’s call upon us, his meeting with us, speaking among us, and ministering to us. Like salvation, God’s prior action in liturgy comes to us from outside of us. Through words, tangible symbols, and our fellow believers, God ministers to us. With them we respond again and again to God’s initiative.

The corporate character of worship embodies the corporate character of salvation. Proper liturgy deliberately evokes our *corporate* response, gives voice to our *common* celebration, and engages us together in dialogue with our Creator and Savior.

Mark Earey writes that liturgy “goes beyond the personal encounter with God (without denying it) to the corporate drama of being the people of God.” Liturgy is the church at prayer, serving as a priestly people, interceding on behalf of the whole church and world, and being sent out together on God’s mission.

In all of this, liturgy draws us into the enacted story of salvation.

Understanding Worship

Our worship here at City Church moves through a specific pattern or rhythm:

God **SUMMONS** us as his people

God **SANCTIFIES** us to himself

God **SPEAKS** to us in his word

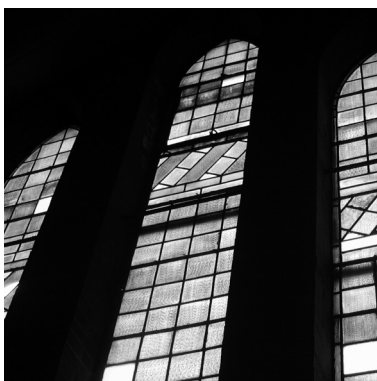
God **STRENGTHENS** us at his table

God **SENDS** us into the world

The emphasis throughout is upon *God's* action. Then comes our appropriate response, celebrating and participating in God's great acts of redemption and renewal.

When God meets us in worship, we respond to him as Christ's own Body through the ministry of the Spirit. We enter into the worship that Jesus the Son has offered through the Spirit both in eternity and in his incarnate life—a worship that he continues to offer today. The Son's own worship of the Father expresses his *vocation* as the one sent out by the Spirit of God. And as he was sent, so he sends us.

Therefore, in liturgy we rehearse the gospel message and are caught up into the mission of the Triune God. The order and flow of liturgy aim at drawing us further into the life of the Trinity and then impelling us outward into our world. Worship is missional *because* it is Trinitarian.



The Shape of Our Liturgy

So how does City Church reflect these convictions in our worship? In this progression:

1. God **SUMMONS** us as his people:

Calling

As we meet together each week, we recognize in the **preparation** that God, through his word and Spirit, gathers us into his presence and calls us into his life and mission.

We enter his presence with our **opening song** to him. As God begins to speak to us, we then answer responsively with a **Psalm** or other text drawn from the biblical hymns of God's people.

As God draws us to himself, we take up his call in a **prayer of adoration and thanksgiving** that directs our hearts to what he will show us today. We end this prayer by singing the **doxology**, or praise, of our Triune God.

2. God SANCTIFIES us to himself: *Cleansing*

Throughout Scripture, when people find themselves in God's presence, they sense how far short they fall and become aware of their own shame and brokenness.

In the same way, we make a **confession of sin**, both as a community and also silently as individuals for ourselves and for the world. Sometimes here will we ask together the phrases of the ancient prayer, called the “**Kyrie**”, saying “Lord, have mercy.” After our confession, with **words of comfort and assurance of pardon** we are reminded that God is always ready, by his mercy and grace, to forgive us.

Then, renewed in our identity as baptized Christians and assured of God’s forgiveness, we celebrate with **songs of praise and thanksgiving**.





3. God SPEAKS to us in his word: *Counseling*

God speaks his word to us here today, addressing us as his forgiven people.

In the public reading of the **word of God** and its exposition in the **sermon**, God shares the story of his saving mission in Jesus, encouraging us to join in that mission and orienting us again to his priorities. With Christians through the centuries, we respond aloud in thanks and praise to God after his word is read to us.

Instructed by his word, we offer ourselves to God's service through our **offering and presentation of gifts** and then by confessing his story to be our own story in the **creed**, which is simply a summary of faith from the early church. Having offered ourselves up in faith through the creed, affirming the power of God's redemption, we lift up the church, our world, and other needs to God in **prayer** for his provision and healing.

4. God STRENGTHENS us at his table: *Communing*

God accepts the offering of our prayers, our gifts, and our selves, symbolized by bread and wine set upon the table. United to Jesus' own self-offering, God draws us together with our meager gifts, preparing us to be a renewed and equipped people, the evidence and vehicle of his redemptive mission.

As **communion** begins, we lift our hearts to God, give thanks to God in the *Eucharistic prayer*, and sing "Holy, Holy, Holy" with the multitudes of heaven through the *Sanctus*.

In the *Memorial Acclamation* we affirm that through this meal Jesus gave us, we remember his death and proclaim his new life as the centerpiece of God's mission. Then, using the *Lord's Prayer*, we offer ourselves in service to his kingdom both now and forever.

God invites us to his table to feed us with his own life, to strengthen us before sending us out. In communion, he unites us together in Jesus Christ as his reconciled and reconciling people.

We respond by receiving the *Lord's Supper*, sharing together in the bread and wine, as a communion in the body and blood of Christ given for our salvation. We remember together his gift to us, singing a **communion song** as we receive from the Lord's Table. After eating together, we give thanks and praise in the **prayer after communion**.

5. God SENDS us into the world:
Commissioning

At the close of worship, God sends us out to carry forward the gospel story. In our worship, we have responded to God's call, heard his word, offered ourselves to his service, and received strength at his table.

God has weaved us together as a new people, oriented to his mission. We recognize and celebrate this in song. God then grants us his assurance and blessing in the **benediction**, based upon scripture and given in his Triune name.

Finally, in the **dismissal**, we respond in thanks and go out in peace to serve him in the world.



Why Liturgy?

Discipleship

In liturgy we *practice* what it means to be a follower of Jesus and anticipate the shape of his kingdom. Embodying the priorities we want to cultivate, liturgy presses those values and habits into our lives.

We take upon our lips the language of Christian prayer, adoration, response, confession, and blessing—words crafted from scripture and historic traditions of worship. Having learned this grammar, we more readily find the words we need to intercede, to bless, to cry out in need, to confess our faults, and to give praise to our Savior.

When we make the words and actions of worship central to our lives, we guard against worldliness and break the hold of secular ceremonies—rituals of consumption, power, fear, suspicion, doubt, and self-absorption that hide themselves in our lives.



Narrative

In liturgy we rehearse and celebrate the mighty acts of God for our redemption, both in the pattern of the church year as well as our weekly pattern of worship.

Liturgy is, above all, the story of Jesus Christ. Jesus answered God's call, identified with our brokenness, spoke and lived the words of God, offered himself up for our salvation, sat down in table fellowship with others, and poured out his Spirit to empower us for his mission.

In broad strokes, liturgy takes the pattern of Jesus' own life, places it upon our lips and in our actions and, in doing so, makes his life our own.

Mission, Charity, and Justice

In liturgy we bring our brokenness, our communities' needs, and the world's troubles before God. He takes these up, heals them by his Spirit, and empowers us to carry forward his present work. This is especially true when we pray for all our sisters and brothers in Christ, the leaders of nations, people at war, and those in danger—our cities, our neighbors, the poor, the imprisoned, the sick, the dying, and the oppressed.

By offering up to God those things that weigh most heavily upon his own heart, we allow his priorities also to weigh upon us: his mission in the world, the unity of his church, the restoration of human wholeness, and the practice of justice and mercy.

Catholicity

While permitting creativity, flexibility, and contextualization, in liturgy we are caught up into something that comes to us from beyond the horizon of our present culture and time. We are connected to the worship of the church in all ages and places.

By deliberately connecting us to the wider church, liturgy conveys an *ethos* of receptivity and gratitude towards the wider church, recognizing and accepting the gifts of the Spirit wherever they may be found.



Humility

Finally, liturgy is humbling. Our worship seeks a repeated *encounter* with our living Lord through word and sacrament to cultivate gospel-shaped lives for the sake of mission.

Our identity and renewal is neither a private, individual possession nor a product of our own corporate efforts. Nor is grace dependent upon what we might feel at the moment or our personal worthiness or intellectual grasp of theology.

In its set patterns, liturgy manifests salvation as a gift we receive from outside of us. God's promise of salvation, held out in the gospel word and sacraments, is offered freely to us. Only in the humility of faith do we receive what God offers.

As a community practice, liturgy urges us humbly to wait upon one another, to set aside our own agendas, and to *coordinate* our actions with those of fellow believers. The humility of faith works itself out in humility towards others.

Liturgy reminds us that God never calls us out of the world simply to confer upon us some kind of privileged status, but always in humble service to his mission. We are summoned together in worship so God can prepare us to bear his saving purposes out into the world.

Further Resources

There are abundant resources available on worship both in print and online. Several helpful resources include:

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship:
<http://www.calvin.edu/worship/>

Mark Earey, *Liturgical Worship: A Fresh Look - How It Works, Why It Matters* (Church House 2002)

Marlea Gilbert, Christopher Grundy, Eric Myers, and Stephanie Perdew, *The Work of the People: What We Do in Worship and Why* (Alban Institute 2007)

Leonard J. Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship* (IVP 2004)



City Church