



A Theology of The Church at Worship Pt. 1
Understanding the Pattern, Shape, Structure, and Practice of Corporate Christian Worship
Spring 2026

Even if the goal of theology is right worship and right living, understanding is not unimportant. . . . growth in understanding and careful reflection on what happens when we pray or take communion will surely enrich and encourage our worship life. There is ample evidence for the barrenness that results from either unthinking practice or unengaged theology. – William Dyrness¹

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Dates (TBD): View seminar recordings and post comments and questions online between **May 18-June 1, 2026**; attend Zoom discussions June 1; 5; and 9 at 7:00pm EDT (4:00pm PDT); submit final assignments June 19.

Venue: Online

Description

The Course

The second of a four-part series of micro-courses on worship arts theology and practice, this micro-course engages in the pattern of worship as a response to God's revealed grace (**revelation & response**), the structure of worship (**biblical liturgy**), the fruit of worship (**forming disciples for mission**), and the sound of worship (**theology of sung worship** as an apologetic for corporately sung worship rather than spectator/showmanship models). From this vantage point, the goal of this micro-course is to offer an accessible and engaging description of why and how the church gathers for worship. With a renewed interest among Evangelicals to explore more traditional liturgies, this course will also give a strong foundation for understanding how each church tradition (including free church traditions) has its own liturgy, and how we can embrace or adapt it to biblical and historic models.

The Series

Many of us equate worship with singing, but the biblical message is far more than this. Unfortunately, many churches fall into the trap of simply appointing a talented individual to take care of music on Sundays, without understanding key biblical and theological essentials about the church's worship. Consequently, worship can devolve into entertainment or looking to copy what seems to be the next 'big thing' in church growth. The result can be Christians who are *mis*-formed by the worship they participate in, developing self-centred approaches to worship, rather than a biblically informed, God-centred approach. This series of micro-courses will ultimately help us think about how we unify our thoughts about Sunday worship, rather than live in the tensions that have divided us.

¹ William Dyrness, *A Primer on Christian Worship: Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We Can Go*, Kindle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009). Loc. 1883.

Student Learning Outcomes

Knowledge and Intellectual Formation (Cognitive Domain)

- Engage the Bible, Christian tradition, and interdisciplinary resources to analyze the pattern, structure, fruit, and practices of gathered Christian worship.

Practical Skills (Practical Domain)

- Analyze Christian worship services for biblical patterns, structure, ability to form mature Christian disciples, and identify songs that enable the dialogical response of worship with God, as set into liturgical structure.

Character Formation (Affective Domain)

- Develop a deeper affection for God by discovering his plan for engaging with his people.

Required Resources

- Cherry, Constance M. *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Labberton, Mark. *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2013. (Chapter 7 – PDF Provided)

Suggested Resources

- Ross, Allen. *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2006. (Chapter 1: The Revelation of the Holy LORD God of Glory – PDF provided).

Assessment Tools

Live discussion dialogue: 40% of final grade

View seminar recordings and share questions/comments between May 18-June 1

Attend live discussions June 1; 5; and 9 at 7:00pm EDT (4:00pm PDT).

Curious and constructive dialogue is integral to engaging with people in conversations about theological questions, so meaningful participation in live discussions is an essential part of this micro-credential offering. In terms of 'meaningful participation,' it means showing up to each of our meetings and speaking thoughtfully to the questions we explore with each other. If you can do that, you will receive full marks for this assessment component.

Following engagement with the recorded instruction videos, our micro-course cohort will meet online via Zoom

three times (each meeting will be an hour and fifteen minutes), to discuss the content in semi-structured conversations guided by the instructor. Online meetings will generally assume the following format:

- 10-15 minutes: opening remarks, including outline of key themes/questions for discussion, provide by instructor
- 35-45 minutes: guided discussion
- 10-15 minutes: closing remarks, tying up of loose ends, by instructor

Reflection Paper: 30% of final grade

Submit by June 19

Length: 1200-1500 words.

Discuss revelation and response in terms of why it is central to Christian worship. Why and how is a proper understanding and practice of this concept important to the spiritual maturing of the gathered worshippers?

Term project: 30% of final grade

Submit by June 19

Length: 1000-1500 words

This project is for you to reflect on and interact with the lectures and readings by answering the following questions:

- Analyze a recent worship service and comment on its structure in relation the historic biblical 4-fold model. Explore the following:
 - Does the liturgy flow through the basic four movements of worship? Was it more revivalistic in its approach? Explain why.
 - Discuss the musical selections:
 - Do the musical selections fit within the goal of each of the respective movements? i.e. is a response song located after the ministry of the Word, be it read, preached, or enacted? Give a breakdown of the theme of each song, including: Who is the main subject of each of the songs? God, me, or other?
 - Did the songs facilitate the prayerful communication of the church with God?
 - What is the form of response? Was it table or other? Was it corporate or individual? Explain how you draw these conclusions.
 - Were there any elements in your service that affirm the covenantal status of the people of God?
 - How was the Call to Worship handled? Did it clearly communicate that God was the one inviting the church to worship? How was the Benediction/Sending handled, if at all?
 - What would you do to your service/liturgy to bring it into alignment with the historic four-fold approach? Do you have the freedom in your context to make such changes?
 - Submit an overview of the service from Excel or PlanningCenter, etc.

Recorded Seminars Outline

Session 1 - Revelation and Response – The biblical pattern of worship (36 min)

- Unitarian vs Trinitarian worship – biblical worship as a response to what God has already done, not us earning his favor.

- What are we responding to:
 - The God who reveals himself – modes of revelation
 - The God who redeems us to himself – overcoming the chasm of humanity's sin
 - The mediatorship of Christ
- Why does God redeem?
 - An overview of biblical covenants
 - The importance of God's fulfillment of his promise

Session 2 – The Fruit of Worship: The Formation of Disciples in Worship who Gather to Scatter. (52 min)

- Part 1 - Worship as God's People – The corporate nature of worship
 - Why we gather – the communal nature of the Body of Christ
 - The Church as the Mission of God
 - Overview of God's presence among his people.
 - The priestly duty of every believer. Eph. 4:11-16
 - The public ordinances of the Protestant Church as worship
 - The 4 Pillars of Acts 2:42: Apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer
- Part 2 - Transformed by Worship – How worship forms us for Christ
 - The fruit of gathered worship
 - Assessing worship beyond the experiential criteria in gathered worship
 - Encounter produces transformation – biblical examples
 - Good worship = effective liturgy that forms Christ in the believer
 - God still reveals himself – the implication for worship leading
 - Good worship = healthy disciples – John 15
 - Right Profession (Head)
 - Right Posture (Heart)
 - Right Practice (Hands – actions toward others)
- Part 3 - Worship as Mission – We gather to scatter (25 min)
 - How liturgy forms us for mission
 - How worship speaks to misused power – the source of much human injustice
 - Worship & Mission indivisible – Eph. 2:8-10
 - Worship as life – Micah 6:6-8
 - Discussion – how should a church's liturgy encourage outreach?

Session 3 - Introduction to Liturgy – The biblical structure of worship (46 min)

- What is liturgy?
- Three aspects of gathered worship
 - Content – Trinitarian/Christocentric
 - Style – reflection of the cultural context
 - Structure – how the meeting with God takes place
- A brief history of Evangelical liturgy and the revivalist 3-fold structure
- Biblical pattern of worship – 4-fold Structure
- Neh. 8; Is. 6; Ex. 24; Matt. 17
- A Gospel shaped liturgy
- Breakdown of the actions of historic liturgy

- Triological nature of historic 4-fold liturgy

Session 4 - Theology of Worship in Song: The sound of worship (Is. 12 & The Song of the Redeemed) (43 min)

- Overview of NT actions of worship
- Paul's exhortation – Co. 3:16; Eph. 5:19
- Biblical reasons for singing
- Historical reasons for singing
- Theological reasons for singing – Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Zwingli
- Physiological reasons for singing
- 10 Reasons why we should sing in church
- Isaiah 12 – The Song of the Redeemed

Resulting Academic Credit

This micro course leads to 1 hour of academic credit at Northwest. Usually this will be recognized with a “Letter of Completion” issued to document continuing education work. Completion of 3 Lifelong Learning micro courses in a three-part series (or 3 closely related topics), worth a total of 3 credit hours, may be applied to another Northwest competency-based credential such as the GAP Year, CCF, or possibly a Graduate Certificate.

If you are in or are thinking about enrolling in a CBTE program at Northwest, work you do for this micro course offering may be used for advanced standing in the following competencies:

Undergraduate

108. Consistently Worship God: 108.2: Explain why and how worship is a principal purpose of Christians and the church, share why and how spiritual disciplines and practices help Christians and the church fulfill this purpose, and compare this to other expressions of worship in your context.

306. Intentionally Worship God: 306.1: Reference passages in scripture which portray worship taking place and use theological sources to characterize what happens when a person and a church practices these forms of worship.

Graduate

702. Worship: competency 702.3: Prayerfully, creatively, and collaboratively plan for and lead worship gatherings that glorify God and form people in your ministry context

702. Worship: competency 702.4: Create opportunities in your ministry context for people to be received into the family of God, especially people who are marginalized, lonely, and harmed by unhealthy relationships and/or difficult circumstances

What are competencies?

A competency is an “I can...” statement about something to do with knowledge, skill, and/or character.

For example...

If you can say “I can recite Psalm 23 from memory,” that’s a knowledge competency.

If you can say, “I can preach a sermon on Psalm 23 in a way that honours the scriptural text and engages people in a transformative way,” that’s a skill competency.

If you can say, “Psalm 23 has helped transform my understanding of and relationship with God, and this has made me a more faithful follower of Jesus,” that’s a character competency.

And, to help you achieve competencies you cannot currently say “I can...” about, we provide you with resources and assignments to help you get to place where you can say, with confidence, “I can...”.

How are competencies developed and assessed?

You instructor(s) will provide you with assignments (see above) to help you develop competencies and show how that development has taken place. Those assignments will be assessed using the following rubric (which describes three different levels of competency):

Rubric	Description	Mentor Input
Exemplary	The learner has mastered this competency to the level that their performance is exceptional and could be relied upon to teach and supervise development of this competency in others.	14/14
Accomplished	The learner has invested significant time and effort to develop and demonstrate mastery of this competency to the degree that their skill and proficiency can be used as an aspirational reference point for others.	13/14
Proficient	The learner can be trusted to consistently and reliably demonstrate satisfactory mastery of this competency across diverse situations.	12/14
Insufficient	The learner does not yet meet the criteria for proficiency in this competency.	0/14

If your development of a competency is assessed as insufficient, you have as much time as you need to develop it. Your instructor(s) will give you focused feedback, suggestions, action items, etc. to help you in this development process.