

45 WAYS TO ENHANCE WORSHIP (THE GATHERING) IN 2019

Ideally, worshipping God would always be inspiring and meaningful, and we'd always give it our all. But, like everything else in life, it's possible to sometimes lose our focus and begin going through the motions. What should be inherently meaningful can become routine.

Steven Hovater and Steve Johnson suggest the following 45 ways to give a "booster shot" to our worship Gatherings and to enhance our communal and individual experiences...

1. ***Come with a listening spirit.*** Have ears ready to hear what will be offered from Scripture. Have an attitude that God is about to communicate something important to me and I need to be listening for it.

2. ***Come early.*** Give yourself time to settle in and prepare for what is about to happen. Rushing in at the last minute or arriving late sends the wrong message.

3. ***Stay late.*** Give your conversation with people time to breathe. Have more to say than "hi" and "good to see you."

4. ***Unplug.*** Leave your phone at home or turn it off. You can check the news and weather and send texts when you are through and the rest of the week.

5. ***Plug-in.*** Yes, this contradicts #4; but, rather than be distracted by technology, use it to engage others. Tweet/Facebook/Instagram things that thoughtfully struck you about the service/lesson.

6. ***Move.*** Sit closer to the front or farther back, or on a different side of the building. This will help you meet new people—visitors and other members—and have a different vantage point of the service.

7. ***Sleep well/long the night before.*** Come rested and ready to worship.

8. ***Expand your scope.*** Think about other Scriptures, Bible stories, and songs that might support the lesson theme.

9. ***Receive a song.*** Don't sing a song, but let the family sing it to you. Hear their hearts. (Of course, don't do this for every song; you still need to sing!)

10. ***Turn up the volume.*** Sing louder than you are comfortable. This encourages others around you to sing out.

11. ***Be hospitable.*** Welcome people, especially visitors, like they are guests in your home. Because in reality, the church is your home.

12. ***Read ahead.*** Meditate on the sermon text (possibly found in the bulletin) or some other Scripture before worship begins. (*At Lafayette, the suggested text to read is sent out in the Gathering on Fridays. Make it a habit!*)

13. ***Recreate the text in your memory.*** Try to write down or verbalize the main Scripture reference word for word. Then decide what's missing that you didn't recall.

14. ***Write at least one thing down.*** Write down something significant about the sermon, a song, communion, or a conversation you had. What's the one biggest thing you took away from this experience?

15. ***Be physical.*** Worship with your body. Consider your posture. Most of us are used to worshipping in whatever way is typical in our tradition. Do not be embarrassed to branch out or experiment. Raise a hand while singing. Clap. Sway. Close your eyes. Connect with God in mind, spirit...and body.

16. ***Stretch.*** Intentionally wake your body for worship beforehand. Get the blood flowing.

17. ***Talk in church.*** If a particular song or sermon point or something else had an impact on you, lean over and share that with your neighbor. This doesn't mean carrying on a 20-minute conversation.

18. ***Talk back.*** Appropriate responses at the appropriate time (e.g., Amen, Yes, Alright, That's right, Come on, etc.). Most preachers appreciate the feedback and encouragement.

19. ***Pray for God's Spirit to work.*** Pray for yourself and pray for others that have heard the lesson. Pray that you or someone else will be touched by the service in some way.

20. ***Smile at children.*** Learn their names and greet them by name. Help them know that this place is home to them—that they belong here. Help young parents, especially, to know their children belong, too.

21. ***Don't be a critic.*** Worship is not the movies—it's not a show to be judged or rated. We are there to worship God, not be entertained.

22. ***Sing to someone.*** Give the song to someone else. Think about someone else as you are singing a song.

23. ***Sing the words.*** Pronounce the words; understand the words. Don't just regurgitate lyrics.

24. **Fast.** The huge breakfast just prior to worship may not always be the best approach.
25. **Sketch.** Capture something meaningful with a drawing.
26. **Commune with intent.** Seriously think about each aspect of the Communion/Table/Eucharist as you participate and partake. Do the same with other elements of worship.
27. **Attend to the absent.** Notice who isn't present so that you can send a card or call them to let them know they were missed. Give them a short synopsis of the sermon. Do this with love and gentleness.
28. **Debrief.** Talk about the service and lessons learned with others (not critically, see #21). Ask your spouse or children what was the most important thing they learned. What did they/I learn about God, others, and self? Encourage your children to write notes in the margin.
29. **Surrender.** Come in and allow the lesson or worship experience to create problems in your life.
30. **See anew.** Enter the worship assembly as if it was your first time to worship God. Reflect for a moment on what it means to be in the presence of God...holy ground.
31. **Practice.** If there was a song you didn't know, work on it throughout the week.
32. **Take notes.** Take notes about everything, not just the lesson... communion devotional, favorite song, prayer list, etc. Writing in general helps disentangle our thoughts.
33. **Pick a song.** Take one of the songs sung that week and sing it throughout the week.
34. **Pre-pray the order of worship.** When you arrive, look over the bulletin worship schedule and pray for those presiding and participating.
35. **Seek the Lord.** Think about how God has been revealed through the worship. As you depart, ask yourself, "Where did I see or feel God today?"
36. **Free your worship tone.** Allow your worship to have a range of emotions (e.g., laugh, cry, reflect, nostalgic, etc.). Worship need not, and is not, a purely mental, intellectual endeavor.
37. **Explore the elements of worship.** Think about each act of worship and its significance.
38. **Shift perspective.** Worship with someone else's mindset. How might my son/mother/friend be receiving this message?
39. **Consider God's character.** What did I learn about the nature of God today? Encounter a God who is love.
40. **Own worship.** Don't let somebody else worship for you. Don't think worship is just for those leading the worship service.
41. **Keep a worship journal.** How is worship shaping you over time?
42. **Connect the dots.** How is today's worship service connected to your past, present and future?
43. **Prepare to be prepared.** Become malleable. Allow the worship experience to change you.
44. **Accept the sending.** Imagine each week is your missionary send-off. (*For Lafayette, allow the Gathering to prepare you for the Scattering. We gather to inhale God's glory and we scatter to exhale God's glory.*)
45. **Fully engage.** Leave all outside thoughts at the door and fully focus on what is happening.

We are called to worship God *"in the Spirit and in truth."* (John 4:24) Let's not allow our worship to become stale, stagnant, distracted, or routinized. We Gather, we Scatter, we Rest.

Reflection Exercise

Upon reflection, I am content with where I am on the following three tips: (i.e. #26, #15, #38)

Upon reflection, I want to progress beyond where I am on the following three tips: (i.e. #6, #18, #21)

Upon reflection, here are 2 or more further tips to improve my/our Gathering experiences.
