

Worship Leadership and Participation, I

We are going to start by talking about worship leadership and participation. Let us pray.

Father, we thank You for this new day and the opportunity to live for the praise of Your glory today. We confess at the outset that, left to ourselves and our own sinful hearts, we do not desire that nor will we do that. We ask, Holy Spirit, that You would come and be with us. We ask that You would guide our time of talking, interacting, and thinking together about the implications of biblical worship. Help us as we think through who participates and who leads, how we plan services, and how to use the use of the good gift of music. We pray that You would inform us, instruct us, and help us to be faithful to Your Word as we turn toward the practice of worship. Help us learn how to think through the principles that apply and what to do specifically in places You are and will call us. We thank You that You are a God who is unchanging in Your being but dynamic relationally with us, even to this very day. We are not just learning something about the history of who You are, but we are entering into an ongoing covenantal relationship with You. Lord, we cry out to You and You hear us. We ask for Your help and You give it. We acknowledge our need to grow to be more like Christ, and You accomplish more of that. Have Your way with us today even as we go through these lessons together. We ask that You would do these things, for we come to You in the name of Christ. Amen.

One of the important issues related to corporate public worship relates to leadership, authority, and oversight of it. Who decides what should be done? Who plans and arranges the biblical elements into a Gospel-centered worship service for a particular local church? Who participates? And participation is done in two ways. One is in a solo voice, like a preacher or one person reading Scripture. It could be one person giving a testimony, a musical solo, or a single voice of prayer. Then there is the congregational voice. This is usually in unison or responsive readings, singing, Scripture, and prayers. When we recite the Apostle's Creed together, that is a congregational voice. Part of the question is this: for whom is it appropriate to stand up front or out somewhere else in the worship space and lead worship with the solo single voice? That is one of the questions we will cover today under the topic of worship leadership and participation.

One of the places I want to look at first is Ephesians 4. It is a key passage in understanding the ministry of the church in general. There is a relationship between those who are called and set apart to be leaders and the rest of the flock. The larger context is God's calling His people. In Ephesians 4:1-16, we see four kinds of callings. It says,

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:

“When he ascended on high,
he led captives in his train
and gave gifts to men.”

(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the

whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

The first calling here is in verse 1, which says, "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." It is the most foundational calling of the Christian life. It is being called out of darkness, from sin and death, into the kingdom of God's Son, of light and life. It is being born again. It is that calling from death to life into relationship with God through Christ. It includes our adoption. That is referenced in Ephesians 1. It says, "He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons." It is the calling of regeneration into life in Christ. This is our most foundational calling, whether you are called to be a butcher, baker, candlestick maker, or a pastor. The most foundational identifier of who we are as Christians is that we are called into union with Christ. Everything else flows from that. God's will for your life is to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. Everything else you are concerned about regarding His will relates to that. It is the centrality of all things being in Christ, for Christ, holding together in Him, and Him having first place in everything. We see this in Colossians 1. As you think about planning, leading, and entering into worship as one who may be gifted, ordained, and set apart to be a pastor, worship leader, or preacher, remember that you have a shared identity with all who are gathering. You share the same foundational, fundamental calling into union with Christ.

The second calling that is foundational is in Ephesians 4:2-6. It talks about the horizontal relationship of the church. I remember John Perkins from Voice of Calvary Ministries in Mississippi, saying, "The last individual thing that happens in your life is when God's Spirit takes you individually from death into life and joins you to Christ. Then you are immediately incorporated into a body of believers that transcends time and space." You are in the fellowship of the church, the communion of saints. So the second thing that is most foundational about who I, Mark Dalbey, am, is that I am Mark Dalbey in Christ, member of the Body of Christ. Before I am called to be a pastor, before I am called to some vocational calling, I am called into Christ, and I am called into the Body of Christ. That elevates the significance of corporate public worship. We are gathering to celebrate our first and second foundational identifiers of who we are. I can be unemployed and lose my wife and children to some tragedy, but my fundamental identity of being in Christ and the Body of Christ remains unchanging. This is in spite of circumstances that could be very trying and difficult personally and other things that might identify who I am. I could be displaced from what I consider home. We need to think of ourselves as we gather for corporate public worship as people who are in union with Christ and in fellowship with one another. That sets the tone and the context of who we are as we gather. It is not the medical doctor, the attorney, and so on. Instead it is people who have been brought from death to life into Christ. We are in a family of brothers and sisters in Christ. Pastors are called into leadership positions with such up-front prominence in preaching, leading worship, and being there in people's lives. They help people in tragedies and struggles, through counseling. They moderate session meetings and give speeches on the floor of General Assembly. There are a lot of things that fuel the set-apart side that tend to be set above. It is important to remind myself that Mark Dalbey is not first and foremost a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Mark Dalbey is a sinner saved by grace in union with Christ and in fellowship with brothers and sisters who have been saved by that same Gospel of grace. That should be our heart as we plan and lead

worship for, and worship with, God's people. It is not very quantifiable at one level. How well did you pray today? How good was the sermon today? It is more about entering into this fellowship with Christ and His people. That is the context of who we are as we gather for worship.

The passage goes on in Ephesians 4:7 to say that to each one of us who are union with Christ and fellowship with one another, every believer, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. It goes on to talk about the ascended Christ giving gifts to His people. Every person who is in union with Christ and fellowship with the church has also been given at least one gift by the ascended Christ for the benefit of the church. All believers are called and gifted for a ministry of some kind in the church. Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 are other passages that talk about one body with many members. Christ is the head; He gives gifts to all. We are not to dishonor those gifts that people might consider to be the lesser gifts. This passage says that every believer is gifted for general ministry in the church of some kind. Edmund Clowney's book, *Called to Ministry*, is a great one to have. It is small and can help you or people you work with in terms of discerning God's call to ministry. In the first half he says that every believer is called to ministry in this general sense. They are gifted by the ascended Christ with some kind of gift. In the second half he says that some are set apart by ordination and laying on of hands to be overseers of that flock. But in his book he gives a great image: "The gifts of Christ's grace are like a majestic stained glass window in His church. Each Christian is set in place like a piece of jeweled glass so that the radiance of God's grace may shine through him to add a beam of crimson, emerald, or azure to the orchestration of color blazing within."

I remember a couple in the church I served in Cincinnati in which the wife had had a stroke. She had to be taken around in a wheel chair by her very dear and loving husband. She was not able to speak. She could make sounds, and she and her husband figured out ways of communicating. The conversation came up one time about how some people do not feel like they have anything to contribute to the congregation as we gather. They felt like it would not make any difference in the world if they were there or not. I remember saying to the congregation in the midst of a sermon on some passage like this that Peggy's mere presence in worship as a believer who cannot speak or walk but who is there every week ministers to the body. There is a blaze of light that comes through Peggy because she is there. It adds to the brilliance of the body gathered. We are to view people who are in union with Christ and in fellowship with believers as being gifted by the ascended Christ in some way. They are indispensable and essential to the gathering of His church for corporate public worship. If you begin to look at people like that it will transform how you plan and lead worship. It will affect how you relate to people and greet them at the door.

One of the hazards of being in a seminary is that we are focused on the last calling of some or the few—those who are set apart by ordination to be pastors and teachers equipping the saints for the work of ministry. We find this later on in the passage. We tend to think that church and ministry is all about the set apart ones like us. It is important that we give good 103-hour Master's degree general training. It is still a generalized degree; every pastor has to be a generalist. You need a lot of gifts and a lot of training. We keep thinking that the way to better equip and better train you is to keep adding hours to the curriculum. That may not be the best solution, though. While it is necessary to focus on the specific things needed for the few who are going to be overseers, we need to have regular reminders of who the body is. That is why field education and outside-the-classroom things are important for your preparation. It is not all about you. It is all about the body—that is why you are being trained.

Ephesians 4:11-16 points out that some are called to the ordained ministry of Word and sacraments. In Acts 6 the apostles deal with these administrative and mercy ministry dynamics between the widows and the distribution of food in meeting their needs. We read in Acts 6 that the apostles say that they need to

devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer, so they found seven godly men who were mature in their faith. It was not just that they could do administrative tasks that anybody could do. It was still a ministry of service; it is one ministry in word and deed. But they did not want to diminish the importance of what they had been set apart to do. There was a division of responsibilities within the church. Some are called to shepherd and equip. There is some controversy in some circles, which is influencing some of our circles in the PCA, in this interpretation of Ephesians 4:11. “He gave some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service.” Some think that the pastor and teachers are to do the works of service. But I think that is not a right interpretation of the passage in its larger context as well. If you look at verse 15, “We will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Work there is the work of ministry. It is a particular kind of work of ministry for those set apart by ordination to be pastor-teachers. Their work of ministry is the equipping for other kinds of work of ministry. That is very important. I am not judging the hearts of those who do this, but the problem if you go with the first interpretation is that it tends to be more Old Testament priesthood-like. You have God working through Jesus as our great high priest and mediator. But then God works through the pastor-teacher to the rest of the body. We become the dispensers of Christ’s grace to the rest of the body. I do not think that is the new covenant model. Instead it is God through Jesus to the church. Some are some set apart as elders from among the body. There are some who give oversight and shepherding ministry to the body alongside of Christ. I am not in any way wanting to diminish the authority, oversight, calling and ordination of the “some” for this vital ministry to the “all.” But we can tend to diminish the priesthood of all believers and the gifting of all people for ministry in the other model. It gets reflected in how we plan and lead worship services. We will talk more about that later.

Let us look, first of all, at this biblical concept of ordained leadership as overseers of the flock. I alluded to 1 Peter 5 earlier. Peter says, “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” Peter does not diminish in any way his overseeing role or his fellow elders who are overseers and shepherds. The flock is under their care. He does not want to diminish the role of elders. But it is the biblical concept that leading is serving, so be eager to serve. Verse 5 says, “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older.” There is a call to the young men who are not elders to submit to the elders.

Then he says, “All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” Sometimes in the more elevated view the temptation against humility can be great. It is not always the fault of the pastor-teachers. Sometimes it is the fault of the congregants who would much rather have this model. They say, “We want the pastor to do all the work of ministry.” It is a problem when you match that with somebody who says, “I am sort of a mini-god, and I will do all the ministry.” That was a problem in my ministry for many years. I had made, essentially, an idol out of being a pastor-teacher to a flock of God’s people. I viewed myself as though I were being as God to the people. God had to break me of that and show me that I was really messed up in my understanding. I actually did a physical rearranging of how I counseled people in my office. I was convicted of thinking that I was the one who was going to make things go well for people. Instead of directing people toward Christ, I was creating a dependence on me to keep giving them wise counsel. After I realized that, I literally moved to another chair as a physical reminder to me that the one who was going to help them was the one who was sitting in the chair that I am no longer willing to sit in, which is

Christ Himself. I was directing them to Him. I told the congregation that I was standing before them, repenting of the multiple-year, ongoing, unrepentant sin of trying to be God to them. I said, “As I read the Ten Commandments, I do not know what all of you are struggling with in sin, but I defy you to show me one that is worse than what I just told you.” Some people did not really like that, though, because they wanted to think that the pastor, his wife, and his family had it all together. At least somebody has it together. But only Christ has it together. He uses people who do not have it together. He even calls people who do not have it completely together into this office and gifts them to be a blessing to the rest of the body.

Part of modeling godliness includes modeling repentance. Sometimes we have a view of being an example that subtly suggests we have to arrange our lives so that it appears as though there is no remaining sin. Jack Miller talks about how the elders in the church need to be the chief repenters in the church. In an ironic sort of way, you would think that if they were the chief repenters that would disqualify them from being elders. On the other hand, if they refuse to be the chief repenters, maybe that should disqualify them. Paul is a chief repenter, saying, “I am the worst of sinners” at the end of his life. He was closer to Christ than he was before, but he was also more sensitive to and aware of the depth of his sin. But he delighted in how it put on display the grace of God. There is power in that ministry from that place of repentance and brokenness.

The view that I disagree with based on Ephesians 4:12 is one that diminishes the equipping side of the role of the pastor-teacher and puts it more on doing the work of service. The pastor-teacher should equip for works of service rather than do works of service to equip. I go to the larger context to help me understand this concept. Verse 16 clearly shows that the whole body is to be doing the work.

In Acts 20, Paul does not hesitate to talk about the significant role of elders by way of leadership in the church. Do not think that I am in any way trying to diminish the significance of God-appointed, God-ordained, set apart, qualified, mature, strong, servant leaders in the church. Paul describes his ministry among the Ephesians in Acts 20. Verse 18-27 says,

When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem... Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”

Paul is bold, comprehensive, preaching publicly, and going house to house. It is not a picture of someone who is saying he is just supposed to equip others to do ministry. That takes a couple of hours on Sunday morning, and I have a cushy pastor’s job in which everybody else does all the work. He says in verse 28-31, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!” There is an admonition to lead well following in the manner in which Paul set as an example when he was there. It is serving the flock for whom Christ shed His blood. It is not about puffing up the leaders. He does not hesitate in his writing to Timothy to exhort him. In 1 Timothy 4:11-14 he says, “Do not let

anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.” Ephesus is where Timothy pastored. Paul is exhorting the pastor of the flock to be diligent in this ministry that he was set apart to do by word, Spirit, and laying on of hands.

In Hebrews 13:17 we see both sides of this: “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.” The writer is admonishing the flock to obey the leaders. But in the process, he is telling the flock that the leaders must give an account for the way that they serve and lead. It is a mutual, interdependent relationship like husband-wife, parent-child, and master-slave in Colossians 3. As we saw earlier in the course, weak and strong also applies. Elder-congregation fits into this. There are mutually reciprocal, interdependent relationships. There are certain responsibilities laid on the elders and certain responsibilities laid on the rest of the congregation. In the context of strong, qualified, gifted, set apart, ordained leaders—under Christ, who is over the flock—Paul opens the room up, as we have talked about before.

We will revisit 1 Corinthians 11-14 later. There are a lot of chapters that are related to the worship context. They relate to the Body of Christ functioning together and exercising its gifts. Paul is in no way saying that it is in isolation from or in rebellion against these godly overseeing leaders. Just as in a marriage, if I am leading well as the head of my home, my wife and children are going to be encouraged to discover and utilize their gifts for the blessing and benefit of the home and beyond the home. They will do this in the mission God has called this family to, to advance His kingdom. There should be delight in being under the oversight of authority. There is a certain safety and freedom that comes and allows you to explore and utilize your gifts and interests within that. Elders in the church should lead well in a way that does not deny or abdicate their headship, leadership, and authority. They should lead in a way that encourages the whole body, in which each member is a precious jewel, as Clowney puts it. Then the people can discover and utilize their giftedness and who they are in Christ for the benefit of the body. That is how the church builds itself up in love and grows into greater Christ-likeness. It is not when they are passively watching the few, desperately trying to be something they can never be this side of glory. They are trying to keep up the front that at least the elders have it together. That is not what worship is. We are coming together into the presence of Christ, celebrating the triumphs of His grace in the past week and repenting and crying out to Him for mercy and forgiveness. We should ask for enabling and empowering grace to walk in greater Christ-likeness in the coming week. The elders lead the way in that. The preacher leads the way in that. That does not abdicate leadership. That is consistent with a Christ-like New Testament call to servant leadership.

Let us look at 1 Peter 2:4-5 for a moment. It says, “As you come to him, a living stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Christ is the living stone. The holy priesthood is comprised of all of the living stones, not just the pastor and elders. All of the living stones who are incorporated into the temple of God in which the Spirit dwells are offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. This is a very strong passage that encourages full participation and entering into what happens in corporate public worship. We are all offering spiritual sacrifices to God as a holy priesthood. We are still under ordained, set apart elders. It is not a denial of that. It is a bringing together of two things in a complimentary way. They are overseers, but they come alongside the people, too.

Let us talk about some of the implications for who leads in a worship service in the up-front, solo voice. Think back to the Hebrews 2 passage that we talked about earlier. Christ stands in the congregation declaring God's name and singing God's praise. The dialogue of worship between God and His people has Christ at the center place leading both sides. I do not want to set hard and fast rules, but as a general principle the portion of the worship service in which Christ declares God's name in the dialogue of worship ordinarily should be led by elders. The parts of the worship service in which Christ is leading the congregation in the response, when there is a solo voice part of that, can be led by anybody in the congregation. They are part of the priesthood of all believers and have access to God. The elders are worship leaders with authority and oversight derived from Christ. They are under Christ declaring God's name. They are responsible for directing the Gospel storyline that we talked about previously. This includes things like the call to worship, the declaration of pardon, the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the benediction. It is generally helpful to communicate authoritative instruction and the rubrics that connect elements of worship by having the elders do it. The elders are the ones who are to have teaching authority and oversight in the church. Those are the portions of the worship service where that is most reflected.

The congregation is made up of worship responders led by Christ. Songs, prayers of response, Scripture responses, testimonies, the bread and the cup, and the professing of faith are all matters that the congregation is invited to participate in. They do this in congregational voice and at times even in individual voice. Christ is the worship leader (Hebrews 8). He is the one who connects heaven and earth (Hebrews 12). He is involved in every detail of the worship service. When we think about who is actually leading and participating in worship, it is ultimately Christ. He is present in the local church worship through the Holy Spirit. The earthly human worship leader is to be a gifted, trained, ordained elder. Usually he is a teaching elder in our PCA context of teaching and ruling elders. There could be a gifted, well-qualified ruling elder who could be your regular worship leader, though. The authority in worship comes from the session, the body of elders. Usually the teaching elder or one of the elders is the one who is delegated to carry that authority. Functionally a lot of churches do not have the whole session of 4-12 elders reviewing every detail of every worship service before it is done. But there should be a general overseeing and a helping to set the direction of the service. There should be dialogue between the pastor and elders about matters of worship or the upcoming preaching series. I used to regularly go to the elders and say, "When I am done with this, here are a few things I am thinking about as I am trying to understand the life of the congregation. What do you think? What are you hearing? What kind of food needs to be fed to the flock at this point in its history and Gospel story as a congregation?" It is important to have regular dialogue and interaction with the other ordained teaching and ruling elders in the church over matters of worship.

The corporate congregational unison participation consists of songs, prayers, Scripture readings, creeds, vows, responses, the bread and the cup, and the corporate Amen, which comes from 1 Corinthians 14:16. Let us read that passage now. It says, "If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving since he does not know what you are saying?" It seems to imply that at least in our hearts we are saying Amen to things that happen. I am laughing because I am kneeling, raising hands, and saying Amen in my heart. Do not ask me actually to vocalize it, lift them, or get on my knees! This is a good passage that says things should be done in a way in which people can say Amen. That is a reminder to a preacher. I find it helpful when people actually talk back when I am preaching. It usually does not happen in most of the churches that I preach in. We developed a close relationship with an African-American congregation in Indiana. To this day one of my best friends was the pastor of that church. He is in Michigan now. We did some pulpit exchanges where he would preach at a joint service at our church and vice versa. We would combine our choirs, which was a stretching experience for our choir. They had to learn to sing

without having music in front of them. There was not actually any music for it! Then the choir director would point to one of our women and ask her to lead the solo part. When I preached in their church, a lot of people were saying Amen to a lot of things I was saying. It raised my emotional level in my preaching. That is a good thing for me. Afterward some of the people from our congregation asked why I never preached like that in our church. I told them if they gave me as much feedback as I got that day I might do that! There is a sense that people are actually receiving what you are saying. It raises the level of the importance of the preaching and the purpose of it as well. It is not for them to give you a written evaluation at the end, but it is actually to impact their lives.

Let us talk about the utilization of lead worshipers. This is the person up front leading with his or her own single voice as the only thing being heard at the time. What does that look like? Let us look at 1 Corinthians 14:26. We had a lengthy discussion about this passage in the Doctor of Ministry course I taught earlier this summer. That discussion made me go back and do some more study of the Scripture. I look at D. A. Carson's little book on 1 Corinthians 12-14. The passage says, "What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church." Given the context and the language he seems to be talking about coming together in corporate public worship. Technically it could be in a small group Bible study. There is some coming together and corporate gathering. It does not say that when you come together listen carefully to the preacher alone who has something to give you. The apostle Paul is not saying that this is in place of the preaching of the Word and the oversight of the elders. Later in this passage, in verse 33, he talks about women in worship. "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches." I personally think what was going on at that point was there was evaluation by the elders of some of these things that had been brought by everybody as to whether or not they were authoritative and from the Lord. During that time, the women and the non-elder men were not the ones who were to make the decisions about whether or not what people said should be received as from the Lord. The elders are the ones who are equipped, trained, and called to do that. I do not think that the overseeing authority of the elders is somehow missing from 1 Corinthians 11-14, but under it there is an encouragement that when you come, everyone has something to bring.

This could radically change the way we do worship if you consider the implications. It seems to be implying a lot more spontaneity than we have in most Presbyterian churches. Granted, it is at a time before the canon of Scripture is complete. The need for words of prophecy and tongues interpreted was part of the way God spoke to the people then, which we now have in the fullness of Scripture. In redemptive history there are some dynamics here that no longer are as necessary as they were then. At the same time, I have been in gatherings with college ministry staff where we would have extended times of prayer, song, and Scripture reading that were not organized by one person. Usually the executive director would be up front and suggest that we go before the Lord in an extended time of prayer, singing, and Scripture reading. That is all he would say. Then there would be quiet for a while. Then someone would read a passage of Scripture, someone would start leading a song a cappella, and someone would pray. Then there would be more silence, and then someone else would read another passage of Scripture. It was not preplanned. It was answering the question, how is God working in your lives and moving in your hearts in ways that you feel led to contribute to the edification of the body gathered at this particular time?

One of the two churches that I worshiped in when I was in Italy last November comes from more of a brethren background. They had planned preaching of the Word and liturgy. But they had a section within the planned liturgy that was just like what I described at that campus leadership gathering. People were able to pray, sing, read Scripture, and give a brief word of testimony as well. It was an opportunity

based on 1 Corinthians 14:26.

Part of what the body of Christ has to contribute, what God wants to bring to the edification of the church, does not exclusively have to come from the pastor, who has prepared the sermon. It is not less than that, and that is primarily what should be happening. But there is a place, especially in small group gatherings, for the participation of the body. It depends on the size of the church, the logistics, the history, and the background. It is not like the first Sunday you go to a new church you change the way you do things, unannounced to anybody. You should not say, "Now we are going to have a section in our worship service today where..." I would not recommend that you start there. But maybe if you are the senior or solo pastor, assistant pastor, or an elder of a church you can suggest that you do something like that in your elders meetings. You begin to anticipate this in your daily devotional time. Even in one-on-one discipleship in which you are going to be meeting weekly with someone, you can set an expectation that you will share what God has been showing you from His Word and how He has been working in your heart. Some of the overflow of that is for the edification of others.

The major piece that I see from this that has application to the way I think we should do worship today is implementing testimony. It is not just a testimony of how God first brought me to faith in Christ. It is a window of God's grace where someone is pulling the shade back and showing how God, by His grace, is working in his or her life. It should be a two to three minute testimony that has been planned in advance and cleared with the elder or pastor, if needed. One of the things to think through is the place for the participants to contribute to the edification of one another. As a pastor about once a month as part of the prayers of praise and adoration, I used to say we are going to have an open time. It was for men, women, and children to stand up where they were and pray a brief prayer of adoration, praise to God, and thanksgiving. Sometimes I would ask the adults to let the children go first. I would ask the children who were willing to lead us in a prayer of thanksgiving. Usually once an adult goes and it sounds adult-like in their prayer, the children or newer believers are hesitant to pray. I would encourage them to abide by the ABC's of prayer. They needed to be audible, brief, and Christ-centered. They needed to speak loudly enough. God hears it even if we do not, but it is for the edification of the body. It needed to be brief so that others had a chance and the preacher could still preach his 30-minute sermon. And in reality people are not going to be audible, brief, and Christ-centered, but at least you are instructing them and trying to help them see how that goes.

You can encourage the priesthood of all believers to offer spiritual sacrifices in the corporate voice all the time. That is a primary thing you are planning. It includes responsive reading, songs, unison creeds, and others. One time at the church I served in Indiana, a guy came in late to the service. I had just finished a prayer, and he stood up and said, "Pastor, I have something I would like to say." This is a man who had a personality such that he would not speak even if you asked him to say something. I knew something significant was up for this man to want to say something. He said, "I want to praise God for sparing my life on my way to church today." Then he described a situation where by all means he should have been hit and killed. So we took a moment to praise God and thank Him for sparing Tom's life on his way to church. That was edifying to the congregation. It was a reminder that by the grace of God we all arrived at church that day. And it was encouraging that this man, who was a fairly new believer and not always there at church, wanted to give testimony to God in front of the congregation. I am sure more people went home and talked about Tom's 15-second testimony than they did my 35-minute sermon. And so be it if that was the case and that was what God used to edify and encourage the body of believers. I am arguing that some place and some of the time there should be opportunities for the offering of spiritual sacrifices by individuals in the congregation that can be edifying to the whole body.

As a pastor I need to let some of the elders do some of the up front, solo voice leading. It is good to have

elders read Scripture and pray. It may not be their gift to pray, but if they are shepherding the flock it is probably good every so often for the whole flock to hear the elder pray for the flock. That way they can get to know the hearts of the elders and overseers of the church. And that way it is not always the same voice that is leading in that. Some will be very gifted in doing this. Some elders may be more gifted than you in actually leading different portions of the service. By all means you should let them do this. I pastored a church in which we had an assistant pastor who was getting some experience and was on his way to be a church planter. He was a great preacher (a graduate of Covenant Seminary). He was about 10 years younger than me and did not have nearly as much preaching experience as me. But the congregation responded to his preaching. So I faced a dilemma: am I going to be jealous of that and make him preach less, or am I going to see that as a gift for this congregation in this season of the church's life and let him preach more? Would it ever be appropriate for an assistant pastor to preach more often than the senior pastor? That is a question to ponder. In some models of ministry, the answer is no. But in other models of ministry it might be so. He took a call to another church, but that was something I was beginning to wonder about. I did not always think about it in the most sanctified way, either!

Let us talk about deacons. In some churches when the deacons come up to receive the offering, one of the deacons will offer that prayer. That is a good thing. The deacons do not have to be the ones who receive the offering. We need to have words of testimony or mission moments where the deacons are able to bring into the corporate public worship service the acts of mercy and kindness that they are doing to other people both inside and beyond the church. They do not need to name names or break confidence in doing this. The mercy ministry element of the church's life should be part of our prayer concern, celebration, and expression of spiritual sacrifice of the whole church. Non-elders, non-deacons, men, women, and children can give testimonies of God's grace. They can lead in mission moments and can give sentence prayers of praise and thanksgiving. They can do occasional Scripture readings, not related to the preaching of the Word. We will get into that more in the next session. Music leaders, a worship song leader, leaders of choirs and ensembles, soloists, and instrumentalists are all lead worshipers who are identifiable. They are leading worship at a noticeable time in a way that is beyond the whole congregation responding. We need to encourage that. I even like the visual representation of more than just the pastor leading, where possible. If I am only preaching in a given service and I am not doing anything else prior to the sermon, I want to sit with my family. I do not think that I need to be sitting in the "throne" chair up front. I do not need to be overseeing with a stern look at what others are doing. I would rather be out with my family and come up out of the congregation. It represents being alongside the church. I am not saying this is the way every church must do it, and if you do not do it this way you are not worshiping biblically. I am saying that this is one way to make visible the idea of even the preacher being primarily like the rest of the congregation, in union with Christ and in fellowship with the believers. He is gifted like everybody else is gifted. Then he comes up to preach. That can be a good thing. I like the choir to come up from their seats with their families, sing, and then go back and sit with their families. I know it is a little disrupting, but it gives the sense throughout the service that there are participants from the "living stones" (1 Peter 2) who come up and go back. There is a movement. We are ministering under Christ and the oversight of the elders. Some churches visualize that as all the elders wearing robes and sitting in the front row. That is not necessary, but it is not wrong. But I like that movement in the churches that I have served.