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FAR AND NEAR:
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP OF THE TRANSCENDENT
AND IMMANENT GOD OF WONDERS

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APPROVAL SHEET

FAR AND NEAR:
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP OF THE TRANSCENDENT
AND IMMANENT GOD OF WONDERS

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To Bill Keith, my first ministry mentor,
who faithfully modeled how to love God and to love people,
and to my sister, Nicole Lewis,
who took time away from influencing the world to influence my world.

I am forever grateful.

Soli Deo Gloria

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	The Annual Church Profile of Southern Baptist Churches
CCLI	Church Copyright License
NSYR	The National Survey of Youth and Religion
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
WDP	The Worship Design Project 2014

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PREFACE

Pursuing a research doctorate in the area of God's transcendence and immanence conveyed in Christian worship is a humbling experience. Along the way, one learns of his own frailty, his own inadequacies to say anything about God, his dire need for God's grace, and his need for the help and support of others. Though I feel utterly inadequate to speak about God, I am grateful for his grace to try and for the people along the way God has used to be agents of spiritual formation in my life. I would like to acknowledge a few.

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I am thankful to Scott Connell, whose life-long friendship has enriched my life and challenged my personal walk with the Lord. I am eternally grateful to the Lord for

calling us both to serve at Boyce College and Southern Seminary and for the opportunity to journey through the PhD in Christian Worship together.

Also, I am indebted to Bill Keith, esteemed minister of music at First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach, Florida, who decided to take a chance on a young, inexperienced seminary graduate and hire him as his associate. From Bill, I learned the essence of pastoral ministry in the local church: to whole-heartedly love God and to graciously love people.

I want to acknowledge the gracious help of Cody Libolt, a godly worship leader, husband of Sasha, and new father of Ira. Cody was instrumental and influential to this dissertation in two significant ways. First, Cody served as my research assistant specifically in the area of data management for the Worship Design Project 2014. Second, Cody's brilliant philosophical mind and passionate heart for leading Christians to genuinely and whole-heartedly worship God in spirit and truth were immensely instrumental in helping me to formulate my own thoughts about how the transcendence and immanence of God should influence worship planning and design.

I would also like to acknowledge Steve McCord, who serves tirelessly at the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Steve was significantly influential in assisting with the statistical analysis of the data from the Worship Design Project 2014.

Bruce A. Ware taught the first theology course in which I was privileged to enroll at Southern Seminary. His teaching was both inspiring and transformative. Dr. Ware is a professor/pastor who teaches out of the overflow of a profound personal knowledge of and dynamic relationship with the Word. After my first class with Dr.

Ware, my desire was to take as many classes as possible with him and to learn as much as I could from him. Little did I know that many years later, he would consent to be my dissertation chair. His passion for God, love of teaching, and understanding of worship have given him a worldwide platform to shape tens of thousands of hearts for Christ. I will be eternally grateful for his investment in me, and I pray that God will use me in the years to come in the way he has used Dr. Ware to transform generations of pastors who shepherd God's people.

Joe Crider and Greg Brewton are great men of God and humble, selfless worship leaders who have dedicated their lives to ensuring that God is glorified in and through the next generation of worship leaders who train at Southern Seminary and Boyce College. I could not have asked for any better teaching mentors and partners in ministry training than these two gentlemen. I look forward to each day of teaching at Southern Seminary because I get to do life and ministry together with godly men like these.

A final word to conclude: this dissertation is born out of nearly two decades of ministry at First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach, Florida (a.k.a. Family Church)—a phenomenal church comprised of remarkable worshipping Christ-followers whom I love dearly. I am forever grateful for this church family and for each Sunday morning service, Sunday evening service, Wednesday choir rehearsal, band rehearsal, praise team rehearsal, mission trip, camp, retreat, staff meeting, and special moment that the Lord so graciously and faithfully gave us a glimpse of his glory.

May this work encourage future worship pastors to understand and teach of the utter transcendence of the God we worship and then the unfathomable expressions of the

immanence of God that he so graciously grants to those whom he has redeemed for his glory.

Chuck T. Lewis

Louisville, Kentucky

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. (Eccl 5:1-2)¹

Statement of the Issue

Christians across the globe make a weekly pilgrimage to their respective churches to engage in a series of religious rituals they call worship. They gather in schools, homes, church sanctuaries, gymnasiums, storefronts, and a host of other settings to express their devotion to the invisible God of the Old and New Testaments. For many Christians, the weekly rhythm of gathering for corporate worship defines and shapes their view of God, themselves, and their world. Yet, like any repeated ritual, personal and corporate acts of worship are vulnerable to becoming routine, familiar, perfunctory, anemic, lifeless, purposeless, and meaningless.

In modern times, it is entirely possible for Christians to gather for corporate worship with an underdeveloped understanding of whom they worship and limited knowledge about why they worship. In the midst of a self-focused, chaotic, and often frantic world, worshipers can easily arrive at church with little awareness of a sense of

¹Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture is quoted from the *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008).

call by a holy and righteous God to drink deeply from the well of Truth and to passionately express adoration, confession, contrition, and thanksgiving to the one who redeemed them for his own glory. The alarm may be sounding. Have worship expressions for many become stale and weak with none of the intensity that is depicted in Old and New Testament worship encounters with God?

If any of the above assertions are true, one might rightly ask why they are true. What are the catalysts that lead a redeemed believer to dispassionate, lifeless, empty expressions of worship? Has worship in the modern church, and particularly churches in the free evangelical tradition, lost its biblical moorings? Could it be that, in light of Reformation liberties, worship services that are free from mandated formulae, creeds, or structure have unwittingly relinquished a biblical view of God that demands awe, reverence, and wonder? Could it be that, in postmodern America, anthropocentrism has permeated Christian culture so much so that God has been displaced from his rightful position as the central figure in worship and instead replaced with created things? In the opening thoughts of his letter to the church in Rome, the Apostle Paul addresses this human tendency to displace God:

²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Rom 1:21-23)

All are vulnerable, even those who faithfully gather in corporate worship settings, to the human propensity to exchange the glory of the transcendent God of wonders for something far less worthy. All are prone to wander.

Could the modern church be in need of a second reformation to reeducate and renew an appropriate, biblically informed vision of the Lord, God Almighty who is jealous of the heart's affection and mind's attention of his people? Should the church be challenged to re-acknowledge God in all of his glorious majesty as the rightful King of those he redeemed with his own blood? Could renewal of theological reflection about the character and nature of God recall the church from its disorientation in worship and thereby enable it to express a more profound doxology to the God of the universe? Can a biblically-grounded sense of doxological purpose reshape doxological praxis? Do the contents and the structure of corporate worship paint a worthy picture of the grand and glorious God of Scripture? Is knowledge of God so underdeveloped that Christians essentially worship without a complete picture in their mind's eye of the one who Scripture says is singularly and exclusively worthy of worship? Do believers in Christ possess enough knowledge of God to properly fuel worship, or does ignorance of God simply cripple worship?

To know God, to love God, to worship God, to glorify God forever—these phrases describe the ultimate goal for all people of God. A more profound knowledge of God's self-revelation in Scripture enables a deeper love for God and a deeper worship of God that is faithful, authentic, pleasing, genuine, heartfelt, and transforming. God wants his people to know him. According to the Bible, the *summum bonum*, the highest good, is to know God. Isaiah 11:9 states that “the earth will be full of the *knowledge of the LORD*” [emphasis mine]. In Jeremiah 31:34, the Lord declares that his people will all *know* him, from the greatest to the least. In Hosea 2:20, God speaks these words to his people Israel, “I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall *know the LORD*.”

Through the New Covenant, Christ makes it possible for people to know God more fully. Jesus reiterates the Old Testament's theme of knowing God and indeed expands on it in John 17:3 to include himself, "And this is eternal life, that they may *know you*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (NRSV). The apostle Paul declares, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of *knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*" (Phil 3:8a). For Paul, nothing was more valuable than the ability to know God, full of grace and truth, now revealed in Christ who is the exact image of his father.² Knowing God, the highest good and the ultimate human quest, defines our created purpose and is the wellspring from which the love and worship of God should and must flow.³

If proper, God-pleasing worship is predicated on knowledge of God, then the Christian journey must include an ever-deepening pursuit of this knowledge of the one the Bible calls holy. If knowing God is a prerequisite for acceptable worship, believers are wise to continually ask two questions: (1) what is the nature of this worship that humans are beckoned to perform, and (2) who is this God who demands to be the sole object of human worship?

²Jesus states in John 14:9, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" and in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one."

³John Piper in a 2014 address to students at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary delivered the following statements concerning the connection of mind and heart, knowledge and worship: "The organ of knowing is given by God to serve the organ of preferring. Thinking exists to serve feeling. Reflection about God exists to awaken affection for God. . . . God gave you doctrine for delight. God gave you a mind to be a faithful servant of your heart. Thinking about God, reasoning about God, knowing God is the necessary means; and delighting in God and enjoying God and treasuring God is the ultimate end of the human soul. . . . Reasoning, thinking, knowing God is the necessary means; and delighting in, being satisfied with, enjoying, and treasuring God is the ultimate end of the human soul" (John Piper, "Don't Waste Your Theological Education" [chapel address presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, January 24, 2014], accessed April 11, 2014, <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/chapel/dont-waste-your-theological-education/>).

The Bible gives multifaceted answers to the question of the identity of this mysterious God. He is the Creator of the universe, the giver of life, the great I AM, the Alpha and the Omega, the one who was and is and is to come. In a broad categorical sense, the God of the Bible is depicted in two ways; he is both transcendent and immanent—far and near, within and without, inside and outside his creation. He is simultaneously separate from his creation and intimately close with his creation. On the one hand, he is Yahweh—the one whom no man can see and live (Exod 33:20). On the other hand, he is the God who draws near to his people, who hears their cries, who comforts them in times of trouble, and who provides for their every need.

Exodus provides a vividly clear depiction of the juxtaposition of God's transcendence and immanence. After the great emancipation of the people of God from Egyptian slavery, God summoned Israel to Sinai Mountain to worship and to receive his covenant commandments. In Exodus 19, God's transcendence—his separateness from his creation—is highlighted. Here, God commands that no man may touch his holy mountain. To do so would result in immediate death. This restriction of human approach to God instructed his people of his transcendent otherness, his infinite holiness, and his sovereign authority. Yet, in his transcendent otherness, God purposed to be near and with his people. Exodus 25-30 chronicles God's meticulous detail for the construction of a place where he and his people would tabernacle together. Yahweh himself designed the physical structure and the means by which sinful man could approach him. Yet, God was careful to remind his people that human approach to him is and always will be limited;

they may only come so far and no further.⁴ Transcendent in Exodus 19, immanent in Exodus 25-30—God is both.

In the New Testament, the revelation of God in Christ is incarnated immanence. Jesus Christ is Immanuel, God with us. In Christ, God reveals himself as one who is intimately personal and near his people. Yet, the juxtapositions continue to stand firm. While Christ is near and with his people, he also remains ontologically distinct from creation, sovereign ruler over creation, and ultimate judge of sinful humanity.

In summary, Scripture is replete with examples of the juxtaposition of God's otherness with his nearness making clear that he is not one or the other; he is simultaneously both. Therefore, if Christians are to rightly and most completely worship God for who he is, they must dually affirm their God as both completely separate from his creation and simultaneously present with his creation. Once the believer acknowledges that Scripture depicts God as both transcendent and immanent, he or she can then ask *how* these two facets of God's being are to be considered. Does the Bible indicate how believers are to approach their transcendent and immanent Creator in worship? Does the Bible give any indication of a proper order in which these attributes are to be considered, especially in individual and corporate worship settings? The search for answers to these questions forms the impetus for writing this dissertation.

⁴“And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death’” (Exod 19:12).

Thesis

The thesis advanced in this dissertation is that, in divine-human encounters, the Bible demonstrates a repeated pattern of conceptualizing and understanding God in his transcendent otherness both prior to his immanence and as the framework within which his immanence can only be rightly understood and experienced. The acknowledgement and application of this descriptive pattern has the potential to influence the liturgies of the free church, the mindset of worshipers as they approach God in worship, and the character of worship in many houses of God throughout the United States.⁵

Humans were created to worship—the inevitable and unavoidable activity of every human soul. The compulsion to worship is planted deeply within human beings by their Creator.⁶ God is seeking worshipers who will worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). God designed for himself to be the exclusive object of human worship and for the act of worship to be uniquely transformative for those he created in his image. As humans worship, they become like that which they worship.⁷ Wittingly or

⁵I acknowledge that *liturgy* is often used to describe the worship structure of Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Orthodox, and other churches that use prescribed liturgical formulae to dictate the content and form of their worship services. However, I use the term *liturgy* throughout this dissertation to broadly describe *any* order of service in *any* church, free or otherwise. I also use the word *liturgical* to describe any element or aspect of any worship service.

⁶Harold Best espouses the idea of all humanity being engaged in perpetual worship in his book *Unceasing Worship*. Best states, “At this very moment, and for as long as this world endures, everybody inhabiting it is bowing down and serving something or someone—an artifact, a person, an institution, an idea, a spirit, or God through Christ. Everyone is being shaped thereby and is growing up toward some measure of fullness, whether of righteousness or of evil. No one is exempt, and no one can wish to be. We are, every one of us, unceasing worshipers and will remain so forever” (Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003], 17-18).

⁷G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 16; see also Ps 135:15-18; Jer 2:5; Hos 9:10-12.

unwittingly, worship is the inevitable response of the heart to that which it most esteems, finds most valuable, and most loves.⁸

As previously stated, love for God and its expression through worship must be rooted in the knowledge of God. Knowledge fuels the affections of the heart and their subsequent expressions in worship. Pastor and theologian A. W. Tozer makes this profound assertion, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”⁹ This statement resonates true especially in the area of worship. What Christians think about God will ultimately determine the fidelity of their worship, the breadth of their worship, and the authenticity of their worship. True worship is predicated on knowledge of the Holy One of Israel. A person cannot truly worship that which he does not know. Therefore, knowledge of God is doctrinal fuel that must undergird doxological expression and passion.

In Matthew 15:8, Jesus paints a picture of vain worship—worshiping the right God in the wrong way—with these words: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.” Perhaps the ultimate form of vain worship is a disengaged heart that is being crippled by thoughts about God that are unworthy of him. Understanding God’s transcendent attributes and immanent qualities gives Christians the ability to form the appropriate doctrinal reflections about God necessary for a more authentic expression of praise to and adoration of God for who he is and what he has done.

⁸Louie Giglio, *Worship: That Thing We Do* (Roswell, GA: Passion Conferences, CD), 1998.

⁹A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), 1.

Background and Significance of the Study

Why are ordering, prioritizing, and properly balancing transcendence and immanence important to modern reflection on worship and worship praxis in the twenty-first century? The concern of this thesis is that corporate Christian worship—including modern worship spaces, songs, sequences, sermons, and instrumentation—tends to be skewed toward God’s nearness (immanence) while neglecting or diminishing God’s otherness (transcendence). The propensity to embrace God’s immanence at the expense or exclusion of God’s transcendence is an unhealthy practice of many modern churches robbing God and God’s people of the fullness of worship expression. When the immanence of God is prioritized in worship or embraced at the exclusion or diminution of transcendence, his grace ceases to be amazing, his mercy ceases to be tender, his faithfulness ceases to be mooring, his sovereignty ceases to be royal, his wrath ceases to induce fear, his perfection ceases to astonish, his abiding care is met with ever-decreasing gratitude, and his perfect provisions are met with an ever-increasing sense of entitlement.

The conversation surrounding the topic of worship has been voluminous in recent decades. Begun in the 1960s, the Jesus movement ushered in the era of praise and worship and was the catalyst for a plethora of books written on worship that targeted a wide range of audiences including the average church goer, the student of worship, the pastors of churches, and the professors of worship in the academy. For much of the 1980s and 1990s, musical style dominated the conversation about worship as the church experienced worship wars often fueled by anthropocentric preference and sentimentalism. Thanks to the more recent writings of Robert Webber and authors like him, worship’s ancient roots and call have begun to receive significant attention in the academy and

among those desiring to ground worship practice in something other than passing fads. Theologies of worship espoused by modern theologians like Bryan Chapell, Noel Due, David Peterson, and Allen Ross continue to precipitate strong biblical reflections on the philosophy and methodology of worship structures and praxis.

I would like to highlight three authors who have contributed significantly to the specific conversation about the absence of transcendence in modern worship and who have helped to raise a general awareness of the problem: David Wells, A. W. Tozer, and Simon Chan.¹⁰ David Wells is the author of a five-volume series originally designed to answer the question, “What is it that accounts for the loss of the church’s theological character?”¹¹ In *God in the Whirlwind* and *God in the Wasteland*, Wells highlights God’s

¹⁰David F. Wells serves as Distinguished Senior Research Professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. A. W. Tozer, deceased, was a noted twentieth-century author and pastor in the Christian and Missionary Alliance church. Simon Chan is Earnest Lau Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological College in Singapore. Other notable authors that have written on the topic of God’s transcendence include Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957); Donald G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995); Leanne Van Dyke, *A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony* (Grand Rapids: Williams Eerdmans Publishing, 2004); Christopher J. Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004); Millard J. Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998); Edward Farley, *The Transcendence of God: A Study in Contemporary Philosophical Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002); D. G. Hart and John R. Meuther, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002); Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008); Rob Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *The Glory of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); and Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004).

¹¹David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 13. The five volumes that precede *God in the Whirlwind* include *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (1993), *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (1994), *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (1998), *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (2004), and a summary volume entitled *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (2008).

“weightless” and inconsequential effect on the modern evangelical church. Wells asserts that God’s transcendence has been swallowed up by God’s immanence.¹² He calls attention to the encroachment of modernity on the church contributing to a loss of its sense of the sovereignty of God and the holiness of God. Wells highlights the impoverished nature of modern worship stating that an overemphasis on God’s immanence has resulted in a diminished emphasis on God’s transcendence and a once theocentric faith becoming anthropocentric.¹³ Wells asserts that awe in modern worship is conspicuously absent and has been replaced with a worship experience that is comfortable, consumable, and familiar.¹⁴ He calls the church to reclaim a lost vision of the transcendence of God and allow worship to be defined by the transcendent reality of who God is rather than postmodern consumerism, individualism, and generational tastes.¹⁵

Although A. W. Tozer is no longer alive, his voice still faithfully resounds through a small but powerful book entitled *The Knowledge of the Holy*. In his book, Tozer decries the loss of the concept of majesty from the modern religious mind. He makes this poignant observation, “The most revealing thing about the church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. She can never escape the self-

¹²Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 14; see also 31.

¹³David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 104; see also 122.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁵Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 109; see also 199, 201, and 203.

disclosure of her witness concerning God.”¹⁶ Tozer claims that the lack of awe and disrespect for the person of God is a result of a “deep blindness of heart,” a dearth of knowledge of who he is, and a loss of the fear of the Lord.¹⁷ Tozer beckons the church to once again embrace a lofty concept of God and dedicates much of his book to depicting the transcendent God of Christian worship.

Simon Chan in *Liturgical Theology: The Church as a Worshiping Community* claims that the transcendence of God has been tamed in many wings of the church, including Evangelicals.¹⁸ He calls for liturgical forms to conform to theological norms and argues that the identity of the church is formed by both the content and structure of its worship.¹⁹ He employs the term *liturgical theology* to describe biblical concepts that should ground the praxis of Christian worship. Because worship shapes and forms the worshiper, he states that true worship must reflect the reality of who God is in whatever liturgical form is being employed. Chan observes that many corporate worship gatherings focus on the attractive qualities of God without focusing on the tremendous mystery of God. He describes these kinds of services as conveying God as “love without holiness, immanence without transcendence.”²⁰

Though many like Wells, Tozer, and Chan have called for the church to re-embrace the transcendence of God in its worship, few have explored how the

¹⁶Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 1.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁸Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 58.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 57.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 58.

understanding of God's transcendence and immanence is to be considered in worship service design and praxis in the free church tradition—a primary goal of this thesis. In addition, I know of no extant work that has attempted to use Scripture's definitive pattern of transcendence then immanence to formulate a liturgical theology that can, in turn, shape worship service design and worship praxis. Therefore, that the argument of this dissertation is a worthy pursuit whose conclusions could potentially be instructive to church worship pastors and edifying to the body of Christ as the church seeks to worship the Lord in authentic, faithful, and God-pleasing ways in spirit and in truth.

In addition, a work of this kind has the potential to redirect the church away from her tendency to overly embrace the immanence of God and to return to a well-rounded view of God grounded in Theology Proper. Theology Proper is of ultimate importance to the church and its worship. For most of the church's history, an overarching sense of the transcendence of God permeated theological reflections and Christian worship. The great, ominous, awe-inspiring cathedrals of Europe built centuries ago speak volumes about how worshipers viewed their God. The architectural imagery was a constant reminder to the people that God was huge, otherworldly, and separate from his people. However, in the last several hundred years the pendulum has swung from a primary emphasis on the transcendence of God to a primary emphasis on the immanence of God. For the modern church, it seems that immanence now relativizes and at times eclipses transcendence. Not only has the church become overly focused on God's immanence, the church seemingly has located God's immanence in something

other than his transcendence. The immanence of God is grounded in something that looks more like man than like God.²¹

The unbalanced embrace of immanence must be reversed and transformed into an urgent movement of the church toward the transcendent. When properly understood and properly balanced, transcendence not only will be present but also will precede, ground, and magnify God's immanence. God's immanent characteristics, therefore, must be rooted in the glorious and magnificent otherness of the God we worship. Only then can God be worshiped rightly and appropriately as the one who is wholly other and the one who dwells with his people.

Methodology

This dissertation employs a mixed-methods approach combining both text-based research and a quantitative empirical study. For the text-based research, the Bible serves as the primary data source. The data assembled from Scripture will be specific to divine-human encounters recorded in the Bible. In addition, theological and biblical

²¹In his book *God in the Wasteland*, David Wells observes that in modern and postmodern America, the distance that once separated Creator from creature has gradually diminished. Truth was once objective and located outside of the individual. Now, the locus of truth lies within the individual, the objective being replaced by the subjective. This inward relocation of truth by modern society has been accompanied by a corresponding relocation of God to the periphery, "rendering him first impotent, then irrelevant, and finally invisible" (119). Wells believes that "distinctions between the self and God have become harder and harder to make and the consequences of not doing so have come to seem less and less significant" (103). In addition, Wells observes a rearrangement by modern man of what is immanent and what is transcendent within God's being. "Much of what should be understood as transcendent is either disappearing or is now being relocated to what is immanent, and what is immanent is then being filtered through the sieve of modern experience" (92). "What once stood over against the sinner is either being lost or transformed into something we discover first and foremost in ourselves" (92). The result of the disappearance of God's external transcendence is a weightless benign deity who does not resemble the God of biblical Christianity (93).

analysis will be employed from secondary sources to provide orthodox perspectives on the transcendent and immanent attributes of God.

The empirical quantitative portion of this study employs a closed-ended questionnaire survey electronically distributed to a subset of Southern Baptist worship pastors throughout the United States. The responses to the survey yielded descriptive research data for subsequent analysis and reporting. The methodological design and analysis of findings for the quantitative portion of this dissertation will be presented in detail in chapter 3.

Definition of the Research Parameters and Assumptions

The research conducted in this dissertation will embrace the following assumptions and parameters. I am an evangelical Christian, Southern Baptist in membership and ordination, and a fervent adherer to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and the Abstract of Principles espoused by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This dissertation fully embraces a Christian worldview and assumes that God is real, personal, and revealed fully in Jesus Christ.

This dissertation also assumes that the Bible is God's Word and his written revelation to mankind. As the Word of God, the Bible carries ultimate and final authority in all things apart from man, church, or council. The church rightly looks to the Bible as the only infallible and sufficient rule of faith and practice. All Scripture is inspired by God. Inspiration means that the words of the Bible were breathed out by God yet penned through man being guided by the Holy Spirit. The Word of God carries verbal, plenary inspiration. Verbal inspiration means that all language—including the choice of words,

grammatical instruction, syntactical structure, logical flow, sequence, word order, and word choice in the original Hebrew and Greek texts—was inspired by God. Plenary means that Scripture is inspired in its entirety. The Bible is God’s inerrant Word. Inerrancy means that, because the Bible is fundamentally the Word of God, it is entirely truthful and free from all falsehood or mistake. Scripture never affirms anything that is contrary to fact. The Bible is God’s infallible word. Scripture attests that God cannot and does not lie. He can only speak and impart truth. Because the Bible is the Word of God, it is also infallible, meaning that it is true and reliable. The Bible alone, *Sola Scriptura*, is sufficient to provide instruction and illumination in all things that pertain to life, godliness, and salvation. The Bible is also completely and exclusively sufficient to equip the saints for every good work. All other texts and all other truth claims are subservient to the ultimate authority of the Bible.

Delimitation of Research

Though Christian worship is a global phenomenon assuming a variety of shapes and forms, the research and focus of this dissertation will be primarily worship practices in North American churches, specifically evangelical free churches represented by the general stream of worship practice found in Southern Baptist churches in the United States. The practices of worship in other denominations and of other people groups, though significant, fall outside the scope of this dissertation.

Limitations of Generalizations of Findings

This research aims to provide a biblical framework for worship planning and design looking first to God as transcendent and then to maintain an appropriate balance of

both transcendence and immanence in worship. I do not intend for the results of this study to be restrictive of future worship developments but rather to be principled guidelines through which trends and developments may be scrutinized, affirmed, or rejected.

Summary of Contents

This dissertation is structured in three main sections. Section 1 is comprised of chapters 1, 2, and 3. Following this introductory chapter, chapter 2 highlights the age of immanence and the age of individualism's impact on the modern view of God expressed in worship services throughout the United States.²² Chapter 3 documents the first research undertaking of its kind—the Worship Design Project 2014. The Worship Design Project 2014 is a quantitative study designed to discover what kind of role the categories of transcendence and immanence play in how worship pastors select elements to be included in worship services and how those elements are subsequently sequenced.

Section 2 is comprised of chapters 4, 5, and 6. Chapter 4 defines the meaning of transcendence and outlines a biblical historical overview of how classical Christianity has understood God's transcendence for much of the last two thousand years. Chapter 5 highlights God's immanence and specifically explores how God's immanence is grounded in and an outflow of God's transcendence. Chapter 6 explores the nature of

²²The phrase *age of immanence* is employed by Edward Farley in *The Transcendence of God: A Study in Contemporary Philosophical Theology*. The phrase *age of individualism* has been used by a variety of modern authors and recently appeared in a New York Times op-ed column by Ross Douthat entitled "The Age of Individualism" on March 15, 2014. The originating sources of these phrases are unknown to me at this time. My use and interpretation of the *age of immanence* and the *age of individualism* will be defined in chap. 2.

Christ as being both the incarnate Son of God who is with his creation and the transcendent second person of the Trinity who is beyond his creation.

Section 3 is comprised of chapters 7, 8, and 9. Chapter 7 is the primary focal point of this dissertation and argues that divine-human encounters throughout the Old and New Testaments display a discernable pattern of viewing God first in his transcendent otherness and then in his immanent nearness. Chapter 8 discusses the implications of the rhythm (pattern) of transcendence then immanence for modern worship planning, the relevance of sequential order, the importance of allowing theology to inform doxological praxis, and a special word of exhortation for worship pastors and worship leaders. Chapter 9 summarizes the previous chapters as well as highlights potential areas for further research.

An extensive appendix contains questions and response data from the Worship Design Project 2014 in its entirety. In addition, the appendix contains a representative sampling of orders of worship submitted by fifty-one Southern Baptist worship pastors throughout the United States. Also, the appendix contains examples of worship services whose construction has been informed by the liturgical theology espoused in this dissertation.

As the dissertation progresses, the following questions will assist in framing my contribution to the current conversation about worship, worship planning and design, and the object of Christian worship—the Lord, God Almighty.

1. What are the biblical examples and directives concerning transcendence and immanence in worship? What is the biblical support for considering transcendence as a healthy and appropriate place to begin a journey of corporate or personal worship? Biblically, how is God's immanence grounded in his transcendence?

2. How can Christian worship appropriately prioritize the transcendence of God in light of Christ, the ultimate expression of God as immanently near and with his people?
3. What are the worship design practices of modern worship pastors in the free church tradition? What underlying philosophies or values shape the way they construct their worship services week by week?
4. What are the liturgical implications of Theology Proper? Should the concepts of transcendence and immanence be significant considerations in the development of a liturgical theology that guides worship design and praxis?
5. What are the implications of appropriately-ordered and appropriately-prioritized expressions of both transcendence and immanence for modern worship service planning and praxis?

Let us now begin the journey by briefly exploring the milieu of this dissertation: the age of immanence, individualism, and the modern view of God expressed in American worship.

CHAPTER 2
THE AGE OF IMMANENCE, INDIVIDUALISM, AND
THE MODERN VIEW OF GOD EXPRESSED IN
AMERICAN WORSHIP

The age of immanence is the plight of our time—the result of centuries of philosophical and theological shifts resulting in a new worldview that, if it acknowledges God at all, sees him not in his glorious transcendent otherness but essentially in his immanent nearness.¹ In the age of immanence, transcendence is no longer the rubric through which God and the attributes of God are understood. Instead, in modern thought, immanence becomes the primary interpreter and regulator of God’s wholly otherness, often rendering God’s transcendence as muted at best and ignored at worst.

In an address to the faculty and student body at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Bruce Ware contended that a rush to God’s immanence that almost altogether bypasses God’s glorious transcendent otherness marks contemporary Christian culture. In this “rush to immanence,” God’s love, mercy, and grace form the centerpieces of the Christian faith without being properly interpreted in the light of God’s holiness, justice, and wrath. As a result, the God who is primarily near has replaced the

¹Donald G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 244.

God who was once conceived as the Creator God who stands gloriously independent of the world he created.²

As the modern view of God is often quick to embrace an impoverished understanding of God as primarily or exclusively love, the concepts of God's majesty, glory, and power continue to become increasingly remote. In the age of immanence, according to Ware, "modern theologians tend to emphasize so much the immanent and relational involvement of God with his creation that the meaning of God's transcendent excellence and independent self-existence is, at times, weakened and diminished."³ When God's love is overemphasized or its source is not properly understood, "we know aright neither the infinite greatness of God nor the nature of the very love that we claim to cherish."⁴ Ware goes on to say, "understanding the transcendent majesty of God is the necessary background for understanding, appreciating, and embracing the immanent mercy of God."⁵ P. T. Forsyth, a noted Scottish theologian, pastor, and educator, echoes this sentiment when he writes, "The love of God has ousted the glory of God, and the grace has been declared at the cost of the holiness."⁶

²Bruce A. Ware, "Avoid the 'Rush' to Immanence: Beholding the God of Majesty and (Then) Mercy" (chapel address presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, August 27, 2013), accessed June 26, 2014, <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/chapel/avoid-the-rush-to-immanence-beholding-the-god-of-majesty-and-then-mercy/>.

³Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 39.

⁴Bruce A. Ware, "Avoid the 'Rush' to Immanence."

⁵Ibid.

⁶Peter T. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority in Relation to Certainty, Sanctity and Society: An Essay in the Philosophy of Experimental Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: Independent Press, 1952), 376.

A. W. Tozer resonates the concerns expressed by Ware and Forsyth when he asserts, the “loss of religious awe and consciousness of the divine Presence” is the sad byproduct of the error in modern religious thought that begins by thinking of God immanently without the transcendent grounding to properly interpret God’s immanence.⁷ Could thinking about God in terms of love without holiness, provision without sovereignty, or immanence without transcendence be a crippling and defining fallacy of modern Christianity? If so, this impoverished approach to God yields what Tozer would call a tragic form of idolatry—thinking thoughts about God that are unworthy of him.⁸

Royalty. Preeminence. Grandeur. Supremacy. Majesty. Authority. Power. Holiness. Glory. Independence. These transcendent attributes of God are the necessary beginning points for rightly understanding God and properly contextualizing God’s love, mercy, grace, kindness, compassion, paternal care, and love. Without transcendence perpetually operating in the foreground of religious thought, both God’s transcendence and God’s immanence are diminished leaving incomplete and malformed thoughts about the character and nature of God. Transcendence unlocks the full meaning of immanence and uniquely provides the answer to the question, “who is this God who draws near?” Immanence prior to or to the exclusion of God’s transcendence weakens the church, diminishes a believer’s capacity to worship rightly, and ultimately creates a picture of God in the minds of Christians that is incomplete, inaccurate, and dangerous. Likewise,

⁷A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), vii.

⁸Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 3.

transcendence without immanence renders a believer's thoughts about God as distorted and his knowledge of God truncated.

Though the church's "rush to immanence" is in many ways an anecdotal observation, this dissertation will seek to add a degree of empirical validity to the claims that, indeed, the church has embraced the age of immanence, and her worship is infected with the tendency to think about God primarily in terms of his immanent nearness. However, before proceeding to the empirical data, I will briefly highlight select historical phenomena that precipitated the age of immanence, the resulting centralization of man, and the consequences of both on post-modern Christianity.⁹

The Journey to the Age of Immanence

For much of the history of the church, the prevailing, dominant, and defining characteristic of God was understood to be his divine transcendence. God's distinction from his creation—an established rubric inherited from Christianity's Hebraic forerunners in the Old Testament—primarily grounded the conception of God by the early church fathers.¹⁰ Continuing throughout most of the Middle Ages, Christian theologians were consumed with the mystery and otherness of God coupled with the inadequacy of human language and human categories to describe the God who is wholly

⁹The historical journey to the age of immanence, the resulting centralization of man, and the consequences of both on the post-modern church could individually be the entire focus of many extensive research dissertations. It is beyond the purview of this work to probe any one of them deeply. However, in this chapter, I wish to highlight a few salient points that will help to establish a sense of context for where the modern church is today.

¹⁰For a deeper exploration of the early church fathers' perception of God, see G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 2nd ed. (London: S.P.C.K., 1952).

other than his creation.¹¹ Essentially, the doctrine of divine immanence was simply not a prominent feature in the early history of Christian thinking and conceptualizations of God.¹²

However, from the 1400s through the 1700s, the medieval mind experienced a gradual metamorphosis as the cosmos began to be reinterpreted in light of the possibility of a limitless universe.¹³ Essentially, the pre-Copernican world was one of order—a closed system whose existence and rules were granted by an infinite and transcendent God.¹⁴ With the dawn of the Renaissance, this theocentrically ordered world gave way to the Enlightenment—the age of scientific discovery and reason. This new empirically driven ideology began to break down ancient paradigms and create new ones. Essentially, the Enlightenment “drove a wedge between faith and reason, lifting up reason as the sole authority.”¹⁵

The Enlightenment philosophy heralded the scientific method as providing the best access to truth usurping the role of the ancient religious texts, which had formed the bedrock of religion and culture for centuries.¹⁶ Empirical verification increasingly

¹¹William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 6-7.

¹²Millard J. Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 263.

¹³Elizabeth Briant, *The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold to Modernity* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 98.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁵Jon Tal Murphree, *Divine Paradoxes: A Finite View of an Infinite God. A Response to Process and Openness Theologies* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1998), 1.

¹⁶John C. Robertson, Jr., *The Loss and Recovery of Transcendence: The Will to Power and the Light of Heaven* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1995), xiii.

became the necessary prerequisite for anything to be considered factual. As the influence of “enlightened” thought and philosophy took root, the traditional concept of the closed cosmos of the Middle Ages was replaced by a new cosmology—a cosmos that was no longer finite, but infinite. For the enlightened mind, this infinite universe could only rightly be understood through the laws of science which governed its every operation.¹⁷ That which was once unexplainable became discernable through scientific explanation and reason. Objective truth became the order of the day, and the source of authority became science rather than Scripture; thus, the journey to the age of immanence had begun.¹⁸ Realities once far away and mysterious in a pre-Copernican world— notions like galaxies, planets, weather patterns, photosynthesis, or biological processes— suddenly became accessible and understandable to the human mind. As this happened, the concept of transcendent infinity began to be transferred away from God to the world and to the cosmos.¹⁹ Author, educator, and philosopher Elizabeth Brient in her book, *The Immanence of the Infinite*,²⁰ states it this way: “In the transition to the modern age, the world comes to ‘acquire’ the divine attribute of infinite being, but only at the price of the destruction of this ancient order and the unmooring of humanity from its traditional place in the meaningful totality.”²¹

¹⁷Alexandre Koyre, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957).

¹⁸Murphree, *Divine Paradoxes*, 1.

¹⁹Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite*, 98.

²⁰Brient’s work is a critique of Hans Blumenberg’s book entitled *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. She also incorporates ideas from Alexandre Koyre’s book, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*.

²¹Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite*, 98.

With each passing decade, science continued to explain away more and more mysteries of the world. As mystery evaporated from the world, mystery also evaporated from people's conception of God. The miraculous and supernatural were replaced by the explainable and the natural causing the perceived distance between God and man to begin to shrink. Antithetical to the worldview of Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and Martin Luther whose God was utterly understood to be mysterious and beyond human understanding,²² the Enlightenment eventually gave birth to secular humanism²³ and classical protestant liberalism—an ideology that saw God not as separated from the world he created but present and active within the natural processes of the world.²⁴ A God who could be described or understood in increasingly human terms replaced the God of the ancients whose theocentric worldview was powerfully shaped by the embrace of a reality that included a supernatural realm superintended by a God who existed independently of his creation.²⁵ Along with the scientific method and empiricism, the theory of biological evolution in the nineteenth century continued to fuel the ever-growing predominance of

²²Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 111.

²³Nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche described the result of this ongoing mutation within Western consciousness as the 'death of God.' "It was a dramatic way of saying that the idea of God, along with other assumptions of classical consciousness, was becoming increasingly unreal to a modern humanity rising up into a sense of its own dominion. The suprasensory world (that is, God and values hitherto accepted as given) has progressively lost its obligatory character as human beings progressively realize their own creative power. Ideas and values which we recognize as created by ourselves can only have less authority than do we ourselves, for we freely generated them" (Robertson, *The Loss and Recovery of Transcendence*, 29-30).

²⁴Erickson, *God the Father Almighty*, 263.

²⁵Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 178.

thinking about God who was no longer infinitely separate from his creation but one who was near.²⁶

Philosophically, Frederic Schleiermacher perhaps best represents the view of modern protestant liberalism's dismantling of God's transcendence. Rather than envisaging God as transcendentally other than his creation, Schleiermacher embraced the idea that God must be experienced immanently within the individual.²⁷ According to Schleiermacher, "The usual conception of God as one single being outside of the world and behind the world is not the beginning and the end of religion. . . . The true nature of religion is neither this idea nor any other, but the immediate consciousness of the Deity as he is found in ourselves and in the world."²⁸ Combatting the dogma of modern protestant liberalism in the twentieth century were the neo-orthodox voices of theologians like Karl Barth and Emil Brunner who urged the church to re-embrace a sense of God's utter transcendence.²⁹ Brunner decried, "Only he who stands free and unhindered above the law of the world, and above the law of thought, is in truth Creator and Lord."³⁰ Yet, despite the call to return to neo-orthodoxy, the rising tide of the age of immanence continued to push ashore.

²⁶Erickson, *God the Father Almighty*, 265.

²⁷David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 111.

²⁸Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 101.

²⁹Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 23.

³⁰Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon (1950; repr., Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 148.

In addition to modern protestant liberalism, the twentieth century's technological developments, capitalism, and religious pluralism fostered by increasingly inexpensive ways of global connectivity fueled the trend toward immanence. As the human world became progressively smaller, mysterious and exotic cultures became gradually demystified. Accessibility replaced that which was once considered remote. The positive thinking movement also fueled the trend toward immanence. As positive thinkers, humans did not see themselves as sinful as they once thought; therefore, the holiness of God was no longer viewed in terms of the sharp contrast to human shortcomings as previously conceived. Pantheism and the increased presence of Eastern religions fueled the trend toward immanence. The development of astronomy and physics served to remove the distance between humans and outer space and, by implication, humans and God. As humans got closer to space, the God that was once transcendentally spatially removed and considered out there or up there no longer seemed as far away. The modern trend toward equality, socialism, and a society without classes created a growing sense of familiarity and lack of formality in social relationships and relationships with God. Society has experienced the disappearance of respect for elders, the decreased use of "yes ma'am" or "no sir," and the disappearance of respect for a leader's position of authority. Pop culture's propensity to trivialize God or take his name in vain continued to fuel the tendency to see God immanently rather than in his transcendent glory.³¹

³¹Erickson, *God the Father Almighty*, 258-59.

Swallowed up by a host of social phenomena including scientific objectivism, the concept of God's transcendence was also assaulted by human subjectivism. Instead of truth being objectively definable through the timeless word of God, truth became subjectively relative. What may be believed to be true for some may not necessarily be embraced as true for another. Subjective, internal feeling became the definitive arbiter of truth, not the external God whose commands spoke the universe into existence. The once strongly held notion of absolute truth whose source was external to the human mind was replaced by the belief in truth whose source has been internalized and relativized to the individual.

The "conquest of the objective by the subjective is quickly followed by a fresh translation of the transcendence of God in terms that are wholly immanent."³² As truth became internalized, so also God came to be seen more and more internally; thus, transcendence became domesticated.³³ As the external God disappeared, he was replaced with the internal God. The "God within" religion has precipitated a society of spiritual people but not necessarily religious or Christian people.³⁴ Today's spiritual people are hungry for an experience since it is their personal experience that defines their own subjective truth and feeds their own subjective appetites. The "God within" people seek to experience God through feeling rather than through objective truths found in Scripture. Experience trumps doctrine. An internal direct encounter with God is sought after rather

³²Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 107.

³³Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 7.

³⁴Ross Douthat, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 216.

than the revelation of God disclosed through Scripture.³⁵ When God is relocated inwardly, the best way to experience him is to connect with the divine that resides inside your own self; thus, the distinction between God and man becomes even more blurred.³⁶ Stripped of his divine characteristics of being wholly other, external, and distant, he no longer resembles the God of classic Christianity.³⁷ He has been relocated away from his central place as Lord over humanity and Lord over the universe. He has been translated from being the external, wholly other creator God of the universe to the God found exclusively within the self.³⁸ As truth has become relativized and God internalized, not only has transcendence given way to immanence, but also theocentricity has given way to anthropocentricity—the inward turning of man.

The Age of Individualism, the Centralization of Man, and the Displacement of God

The age of immanence has been accompanied by the emergence of the age of individualism. According to David Wells in *God in the Whirlwind*, “When God—the eternal God—dies, then the self immediately moves in to fill the vacuum.”³⁹ Though many factors have contributed to the onset of the age of individualism, I will briefly focus on five specific areas: individualism in the early song of the Baptists, individualism and

³⁵Douthat, *Bad Religion*, 216.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 216-17.

³⁷David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-Love of God Reorients Our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 30; see also 34.

³⁸Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 31.

³⁹*Ibid.*

the Puritans, individualism and revivalism, individualism and consumerism, and individualism and Moral Therapeutic Deism.

First, individualism began to find its way into the song of the church and, in particular, in Baptist churches beginning around the turn of the nineteenth century. David Singer in his article “God and Man in Baptist Hymnals 1784-1844” makes an interesting observation worthy of note in understanding the journey to the age of immanence and the age of individualism. Singer writes that early Baptists in America were strict Calvinists holding staunchly to the doctrine of limited atonement. Hymns commonly found in hymnals used by Baptists in the 1700s, according to Singer, were largely theocentric and highlighted God’s central role in the drama of salvation while simultaneously focusing on man’s depravity, helplessness, frailty, and sinfulness.⁴⁰ Singer then notes a significant shift in Baptist soteriology away from limited atonement toward universal atonement beginning roughly around the turn of the nineteenth century, a theological shift that began to express itself in Baptist hymnody. In early American Baptist hymnals, hymns espoused limited atonement and highlighted the central figure in the drama of salvation to be God. As the nineteenth century progressed, the Baptist belief in limited atonement gradually gave way to the largely Arminian belief in universal atonement, that man through his own free choice could accept or reject the offer of God’s saving grace. This doctrine led to an ever-increasing presence of anthropocentrism in

⁴⁰David Singer, “God and Man in Baptist Hymnals 1784-1844,” *American Studies Journal* 9, no. 2 (1968): 16, accessed August 24, 2014, <https://journals.ku.edu/index.php/amerstud/article/view/2157/2116>.

Baptist hymnals.⁴¹ Singer reports that by 1843, the shift to Arminianism was complete, anthropocentrism had replaced theocentrism, and the doctrine of human depravity had withered.⁴²

Wells notes a similar anthropocentric shift flowing from seventeenth-century Puritanism. In the 1600s, the Puritans who settled in New England embraced the concept of God the Father as distant and Christ the Son as near, an understandable but misguided dichotomy between the two. According to Wells,

. . . when the Puritan experiment came to an end, it finally disintegrated, producing two entirely different kinds of belief. On the one side, there emerged a Deism with a remote God, cool rationalism, and complete loss of Christological interest. On the other side, there emerged modern evangelicalism, which looked to a God “invested with all the gospel’s transformative passion” but with a greatly diminished aura of transcendence—the God “below,” warmer, closer, more engaging, and more susceptible to be translated into a purely private deity.⁴³

Thus, according to Wells, Evangelicals released God’s transcendence in order to focus on relationship through Christ and his gospel.⁴⁴

This relational focus was fueled and accelerated in the 1800s by the deregulation of the church by the state.⁴⁵ Separation of church and state in the United States meant that churches would no longer receive funds from the government. In addition, as society became increasingly secularized, religious requirements once

⁴¹Singer, “God and Man in Baptist Hymnals,” 19.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 129.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Early in American history, some states financially supported churches and their ministers. In 1791, over a third of America’s states were engaged in providing “tax support for ministers,” and twelve of the fourteen states required religious tests in order to hold public office (Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995], 64).

mandated by the government as necessary prerequisites to hold public office gradually were eliminated. Since churches were on their own for financial survival, each individual church had to do two things: secure conversions to Christianity and secure members for their own particular church. As a result, church became less about God and more about a church's viability through conversion and membership growth. According to Mark Noll, the government's deregulation of religion in early America and refusal to support any particular denomination caused churches "to compete for adherents, rather than being assigned responsibility for parishioners as had been the almost universal European pattern. The denominations had to appeal directly to individuals. They had to convince individuals first, that they should pay attention to God, and second, that they should do so in their churches and not elsewhere."⁴⁶ Sweeping through America in the 1800s, waves of revivalism fostered this form of proselytizing—the plea for an individual to make a personal salvific decision—coupled with a subsequent recruiting to church membership. Roger Finke in his article, "Religious Deregulation," attributes to the revivals of the 1800s the development of a "religious market" that focused on the individual, thus moving churches toward the pragmatic and away from deep religious thought.⁴⁷ The intense pressure for results meant that very little time or energy was available for thinking about God and the more weighty issues of Christianity.⁴⁸ In addition, according to Wells, the powerful revivals of the 1800s focused on a deeply internal, personal experience with

⁴⁶Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 66.

⁴⁷Roger Finke, "Religious Deregulation: Origins and Consequences," *Journal of Church and State* 32 (Summer 1990), 625.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

God that often ignored the God who is external. “God's otherness was increasingly lost, his immanence was cut loose from this transcendence, and today, under modernity's gathering momentum, these developments have been pressed yet further to produce a form of believing that is hollowing out the meaning of God.”⁴⁹

After decades of development, individualism reigns in modern American culture. Man's fallen affections have turned dramatically inward. Fueled by consumerism and affluence, American individualism expresses itself today in myriad ways. Facebook and MySpace publicly chronicle the details of individual lives once previously known only to a select few. Facebook reported 864 million daily active users on average for September 2014 in addition to an active user base of 1.35 billion for the same period.⁵⁰ *Selfie* entered the English language as early as 2002 and is now an accepted word in the Oxford Dictionary. Twitter reports after only seven years of being in existence a user base of 284 million people who generate a staggering 500 million tweets per day.⁵¹ Instagram, an on-line photo and video sharing service, boasts over 200 million active users sharing on average over 60 million photos per day.⁵² Each social media outlet allows man to tell his own story, to articulate his own feelings, to publish his own images, and to speak his own mind. The age of immanence and the age of

⁴⁹Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 128-29.

⁵⁰Facebook, Newsroom: Company Info, accessed November 1, 2014, <https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>. Facebook was launched on February 4, 2004.

⁵¹Twitter, Company, accessed November 1, 2014, <https://about.twitter.com/company>. Twitter was incorporated on April 19, 2007.

⁵²Instagram, Press: Our Story, accessed November 1, 2014, <http://instagram.com/press/>. Instagram was launched on October 6, 2010.

individualism coincide harmoniously together, both propagating a metanarrative that exalts the individual while diminishing the divine.

In the age of individualism, a view of the world is created where “authority is rooted in the self (autonomy) rather than in an external creed or institution (heteronomy) or a transcendent God (theonomy).”⁵³ In the age of individualism, the creature is confused not by the Creator but with the Creator.⁵⁴ Religion, specifically Christianity, becomes anthropocentric religion rather than a Christ-centered, Word-centered, Gospel-centered movement. Personal freedom, personal distinctiveness, and autonomy are the hallmarks of the new world order where man’s focus has turned inward on himself and God has subsequently been displaced from his rightful place at the center of life and the universe, even among those who claim Christ and who comprise the church of the living God.

Perhaps the modern age can well be characterized by the word *worldliness*.⁵⁵ Worldliness that permeates modern society has fueled the rise of human self-assertion both within and outside the church.⁵⁶ Elizabeth Brient states that human self-assertion is the fundamental mindset of the modern times.⁵⁷ Self-assertion often manifests itself in self-absorption where the avarice of personal preference trumps deference to others. In a world of self-absorption, individualism replaces community. Neighbors have been

⁵³Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 242.

⁵⁴Edith M. Humphrey, *Grand Entrance: Worship on Earth as in Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 7.

⁵⁵Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite*, 61.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 66.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 49.

replaced with neighborhoods. The ephemeral is preferred over the weighty. Self is central instead of others.⁵⁸ “I deserve” has replaced the idea of “I serve.”

In the age of individualism, many American’s abound with affluence. Yet, affluence continues to negatively influence American culture. Wealth and prosperity have produced a reigning sense of entitlement and an insatiable consumerist appetite, even in the church.⁵⁹ Commenting on the state of today’s culture, Ross Douthat in his book *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* makes this poignant observation:

Our appetites have increased in proportion to our unprecedented wealth, and our immediate-gratification culture has been made possible by material abundance and technological progress. Obesity is a disease of civilization. The credit boom is the fruit of clever innovation in the financial sector. Mass media and mass advertising have made over-consumers of us all. The advance of narcissism may have a great deal to do with the explosion of social media and the constant self-cultivation and self-marketing that is required.⁶⁰

Douthat goes on to say that the age of immanence in American religion has enabled the ravenous appetites of individualism rather than serving as an opposing force to them.⁶¹

A striking paradox exists in the age of individualism, narcissism, and consumerism. Never have Americans had so much and been so empty. Abundance of self and the things that the self desires is coupled with an unprecedented sense of emptiness and loss. Depression, broken marriages, anxiety disorder, unhappiness,

⁵⁸Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 28.

⁵⁹Ibid., 23; see also 28.

⁶⁰Douthat, *Bad Religion*, 236.

⁶¹Ibid.

shattered families, broken relationships, and an ever-increasing harshness and cynicism are the disastrous accompaniments of the age of individualism.⁶²

In this age of desperate individualism where God is often decentralized and truth relativized, a new social religion is emerging that has some resemblance to Christianity but denies many of the transcendent realities of Christianity. This new social religion of America is explored and documented by Christian Smith and Melinda Denton in their book, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*.⁶³ *Soul Searching* documents the largest nationwide survey ever undertaken to discover the religious and spiritual lives of the contemporary American teenager.⁶⁴ The research reveals a complexity of adolescent religious life, a valuing of religion by American teens but a limited understanding of the religion they espouse. *Soul Searching* describes a major transformation of faith away from its historical groundings in orthodox Christianity and a subsequent movement toward a new faith that Smith and Denton call “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”⁶⁵

⁶²Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 22; see also 24.

⁶³Christian Smith and Melinda L. Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). The data reported in *Soul Searching* are drawn from The National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR). The NSYR “is a nationally representative telephone survey of 3,290 English and Spanish-speaking teenagers between 13 and 17, and of their parents. . . . The survey was conducted from July 2002 to April 2003 by researchers at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill” (292).

⁶⁴Teens who participated in the NSYR are now in their twenties with some entering their thirties.

⁶⁵For the modern American teenager, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism embraces the following five belief structures: (1) A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth, (2) A God exists who wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions, (3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself, (4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem, and (5) Good people go to heaven when they die (Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162-63).

According to Smith and Denton, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is present not only in mainline Protestant and Catholic students but also among more conservative Protestants, Jewish teenagers, and even many non-religious teenagers in the United States. Essentially, the religion of the American teenager “is not a religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath, of living as a servant of a sovereign divine, of steadfastly saying one’s prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God’s love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice. . . .”⁶⁶ Instead, this emerging social religion centrally focuses on “feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people.”⁶⁷ The God of the American teenager

. . . is primarily a divine Creator and Lawgiver. He designed the universe and establishes moral law and order. But this God is not Trinitarian, he did not speak through the Torah or the prophets of Israel, was never resurrected from the dead, and does not fill and transform people through his Spirit. This God is not demanding. He actually can’t be, because his job is to solve our problems and make people feel good. In short, God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he is always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process.⁶⁸

Smith and Denton conclude that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism extracts elements from Christianity and Judaism for its own purposes. This new religion comingles the goals of personal happiness and self-esteem while helping students

⁶⁶Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 163-64.

⁶⁷Ibid., 164.

⁶⁸Ibid., 165.

succeed in life, feel good about themselves, and get along with others.⁶⁹ How did these teenagers arrive at this new brand of faith so focused on themselves? They are a byproduct of their times—the age of immanence and individualism—which have fostered this development of a religion whose God is a problem solver for themselves, a stuff provider for themselves, and a therapist for themselves.⁷⁰ It is an example of anthropocentric religion ensconced in worldliness that has spread throughout America and has infiltrated the church.

The Consequences of the Age of Immanence and Individualism in Post-Modern Christianity

As the age of immanence and the age of individualism gradually but definitively moved from outside to inside the church, the theological reflection about God and the corporate worship of God have been adversely affected. Forsyth observes the slow shallowing of the religious Christian mind stating, “the poverty of our worship amid its very refinements . . . is the fatal index of the peril.”⁷¹ Thinking rightly about God has been replaced by worldliness coupled with the de-emphasis or disappearance of transcendence from the church. Transcendence has been replaced with consumerism, a deep love of the modern world (rather than for the modern world), and an insertion of man at the center of his own universe and his own spiritual infrastructure.⁷²

⁶⁹Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 168; see also 234.

⁷⁰Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 21.

⁷¹Peter T. Forsyth, “The Taste of Death and the Life of Grace” in *God the Holy Father* (London: Independent Press, 1957), 74.

⁷²Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 55; see also 44-45.

The atrophy of the religious mind of modern America has resulted in a view of God that thinks of him fundamentally as love. Because God is viewed as love, he must be always for us, just like everything else in the market place is for us. The God of mercy is transformed into the God who is at our mercy.⁷³ As reflected by the American teenagers discussed earlier, God is someone to use rather than someone to fear, revere, or obey.

Tozer summarizes how the age of immanence has affected the church: “The church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men. This she has done not deliberately, but little by little and without her knowledge; and her very unawareness only makes her situation all the more tragic.”⁷⁴ The surrender of the lofty concepts of God has precipitated in many worship services the conspicuous absence of awe.⁷⁵ Without the centrality of God’s awe-full transcendent holiness present among his people, “sin has no meaning and grace has no point, for it is God’s holiness that gives to the one its definition and to the other its greatness. . . . Sin, grace, and faith are emptied of any but a passing meaning if they are severed from their roots in the holiness of God.”⁷⁶ With God no longer central in the believers’ lives, they can no longer rightly comprehend the height of God’s holiness or the depth of their depravity.⁷⁷

⁷³Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 135; see also 114.

⁷⁴Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, vii.

⁷⁵Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 141.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 144-45.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 53.

As immanence has swallowed up transcendence, the age of individualism in the church conceives of God who is “below, warmer, closer, more engaging, and more susceptible to be translated into a purely private deity.”⁷⁸ His sharp edges like his wrath, his holiness, his judgment, and his sovereignty have been ground down to make him increasingly less threatening and much more comfortable. In a word, the age of immanence has tamed God’s transcendent attributes in the hearts and minds of his followers.⁷⁹ As transcendence has given way to immanence, those things about God that may be considered harsh or un-fatherly have been replaced with familiarity. Worship in many churches has become pleasant, comfortable, and consumable resulting in the death of its “theological soul.”⁸⁰ When this happens, the God Christians claim to worship no longer looks like the God of Scripture, and worship begins to take on extra-biblical dimensions. One such extra-biblical dimension is found in a worship service whose primary focus is the felt needs of its congregants and guests. According to Wells in his recently released *God in the Whirlwind*,

. . . needs-shaped worship is invariably self-focused. When worship begins from this premise, it quickly becomes a carnival of competing desires, demands, tastes, and private aches in the congregations. It easily descends into the therapeutic world. Sermons, in this atmosphere, are almost always aimed simply at providing a lift, some inspiration, from whatever source help can be had. And this also inclines pastors to infuse the worship with flourishes from the feel-good entertainment world. Is it not striking how, in contexts like these, we can be in worship without being aware of the centrality, goodness, and greatness of God, of his grace, and of Christ’s self-giving in the incarnation and cross? Not even once. Or, if we are aware, it is because we have brought this awareness with us into church and not because the

⁷⁸Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 129.

⁷⁹Ibid., 136.

⁸⁰Ibid., 55.

worship service itself has directed us to these great truths.⁸¹

In recent times, the church has become “far more culturally defined than biblically. It has often catered to generational niches. It has been about marketing a ‘product’ in a way that attracts new customers.”⁸² Simon Chan in his book *Liturgical Theology* makes this poignant observation: “The ‘domestication of transcendence’ is not only found among so-called progressive theologians; evangelicals and charismatics are equally guilty of domesticating transcendence through their marketing strategies and seeker-friendly services.”⁸³ In a world where transcendence is engulfed in immanence, the church has become much more consumer oriented. Large buildings are constructed that have large debts that necessitate large masses of financially contributing people to survive.⁸⁴ In a consumerist world where financial viability requires a critical mass of people, worship services can become much more defined by the worshiper rather than by the object of worship.⁸⁵

In the age of the individual, worship can also become conceptualized as a “worship experience” rather than a “worship service,” the former being much more

⁸¹Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 190.

⁸²Ibid., 198.

⁸³Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 58.

⁸⁴According to David Wells, the decades of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s saw the unprecedented building of large houses of worship, the amassing of large debt by the church, and the pressure to numerically sustain large congregations in order to service the large debt. Pastors, according to Wells, began to appeal to the individual in order to attract large congregations. This led to consumerist appeals and consumerist catering that often took the form of generational catering or pandering. As a result, “the truth of the church is lost as the common denominator among the many individuals is lost. When this happens, local churches seem not to be part of the same bride, body, and flock. Consumer impulses so strongly appeal to self interest that they destroy what believers have in common across generations, cultures, and races” (Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 198).

⁸⁵Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 198.

person-centered and the latter being much more God-focused.⁸⁶ The idea of “service” is the work or duty of a servant performed or presented to a master as a result of his command and for his pleasure. The idea of “experience” redirects the goal of worship away from God-centeredness and the pleasure of God toward man-centeredness. Instead of a congregation gathered as a community of believers to magnify and exalt the transcendent Creator God, worshipers become an audience of individuals—consumers whose individualism can corrupt corporate worship and who are often focused on their own preferences, especially in the area of music.⁸⁷

In today’s ubiquitous access to any kind of music through Spotify, XM-Radio, iTunes, or a host of other outlets, personal preferences can become fixed and immovable creating a consumer of a preferred product that is often carried into a church whose focus then becomes preferential catering to customers rather than focusing on what will please the God of the universe.⁸⁸ When the church’s focus on God in all of his glory is replaced by individualism and a focus on individual preferences, “when it is defined more by the culture of consumption than by who God is, it loses its seriousness. It also loses the sense of transcendence for which the human spirit longs.”⁸⁹

Individualism’s permeation of the Christian mind has even warped how some view the very nature of the church. The congregation of Christ has morphed from

⁸⁶D. G. Hart and John R. Meuther, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 17.

⁸⁷Hart and Meuther, *With Reverence and Awe*, 17.

⁸⁸Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 189-90.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 199.

standing together in the assembly to worship, to being seated together on benches, to being casually seated in cushioned theater seats, to now being comfortably seated individually in one's own living room. Perhaps the ultimate expression of individualism in the church is the modern trend to "go to church" via the Internet. Each Sunday, thousands of people "attend" a church via live streaming in their own home. They have a false sense of connectedness. There is no mutual accountability or edification. The opportunity to "speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (Eph 5:19) is rendered impossible. Community and communion are replaced with solitary individualism. As a result, the believer is weakened, and the church is not built up through the exercise of gifts given to Christians for the edification of the body of Christ.

Conclusion

The age of immanence and the age of individualism intersect in today's religious mind to create a God who "rests too inconsequentially upon the church"—his truth is too distant, his grace too ordinary, his judgment too benign, "his gospel too easy, and his Christ too common."⁹⁰ As classic orthodox Christianity is infiltrated by worldliness, relativism, empiricism, and individualism, God is increasingly "relocated within the human personality, and hence, distinctions between the self and God have become harder and harder to make."⁹¹ The breakdown is essentially a blurring between

⁹⁰Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 30.

⁹¹Ibid., 101.

subject and object, between the focal point of worship and the worshiper, between the Creator and the created.⁹²

John Frame in *The Doctrine of God* states, “We live in an age in which the knowledge of God is rare. Many speak glibly about their belief in some god or other. But most would not even claim to know the true God, the God of the Bible.”⁹³ In the age of individualism and immanence, God’s transcendent otherness has either faded into nothingness or has simply been pushed to the periphery of spiritual awareness. On the periphery, God’s transcendence becomes a shadow; its rich and powerful boldness becomes misty, water-colored, and muted. Relocated to the periphery, God is weightless, inconsequential, neutered, tamed, and domesticated. On the periphery, God still has a place in the life of the church and the life of the believer, but it is neither a place of centrality nor of consequence. On the periphery, God’s transcendence loses its grandeur, majesty, and glory. On the periphery, God’s transcendence becomes impotent to satisfy the deep longings of the human soul to know grandeur, to connect with the eternal, or to glimpse the holy. On the periphery, God’s immanence is left to be his primary defining characteristic rendering both his immanence and his transcendence understood improperly and incompletely. On the periphery, God’s resulting weightlessness causes him to rest “upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticed.”⁹⁴ On the periphery, God is believed and acknowledged, but that belief has little impact on those who believe.

⁹²Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 104.

⁹³John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 1.

⁹⁴Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 88.

The church must recover the transcendence of God and turn from its abuse of the immanence of God.⁹⁵ When the transcendent reference points of God are relegated to the periphery, the church is robbed of her mooring and disastrously weakened in her attempt to find overarching meaning.⁹⁶ On the periphery, the voice of the external God summoning his people grows more and more indistinct. Meaning, value, and values must once again be anchored in and derived from God's transcendence.⁹⁷ Only when God's transcendence is properly acknowledged can the church thrive, the body of Christ properly reflect the God they claim to adore, and the God of the universe be properly worshiped.

The Studies

Most of the information in this chapter could be considered anecdotal conclusions formed by scholars, theologians, and historians who have observed and studied trends in the church and society for many years. A scant few studies have actually been conducted to document how the rush to immanence, the evaporation of transcendence, and the age of individualism have affected the worship life of Evangelicals. In fact, after investigation, I know of no such study that has been conducted recently. I would like, however, to highlight the two older studies that give weight to my assertion that many American Christians have an incomplete, inaccurate, or underdeveloped view of God because of the tendency to embrace the kindness,

⁹⁵Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 31.

⁹⁶Ibid., 94.

⁹⁷Ibid., 101.

tenderness, and mercy of God in corporate worship settings while ignoring or minimizing his transcendent holiness, omniscience, eternity, sovereignty, royalty, and freedom.

The first study was conducted by David Wells in 1993 of students enrolled in the following seven evangelical seminaries: Asbury Theological Seminary, Bethel Theological Seminary, Calvin Theological Seminary, Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and Talbot School of Theology.⁹⁸ The purpose of Wells' research was to reveal how evangelical seminarians perceive the role of theology, the nature and function of Scripture, the role and view of God, the role and view of the church, and a variety of other topics that included worldview, sin, and denominationalism. Most all seminarians considered the term "evangelical" to best describe themselves, and 55.5% identified with the Baptist tradition.⁹⁹

Wells draws fascinating conclusions, but I will only highlight those related to the subject of this dissertation: transcendence and immanence. Wells states that these seminarians "showed a dramatically greater interest in aspects of divine immanence as compared with divine transcendence."¹⁰⁰ Almost 80% of the seminarians rejected the view that God separates himself from the sinfulness of the world. When asked to indicate a preferential statement about God, 80.3% of the students preferred the statement "God's love includes all people. His desire is that all should know him" to the statement "God is

⁹⁸Of the 3,255 seminarians eligible to participate, 1,591 were given questionnaires with a response rate of 45.9% or 730 participants. The sampling error was $\pm 3.2\%$ at a 95% confidence level (Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 187).

⁹⁹Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 228-56.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 194.

holy; evil will not triumph.” Wells states that these answers indicate that the seminarians participating in the survey “are attracted to the immanence of God, a sense of divine presence that does not require mediation or interpretation by the word of God.”¹⁰¹ Many seminarians gave evidence of “moving away from a transcendence-oriented theistic worldview toward a more immanence-oriented theistic worldview, which more naturally assumes that God ensures the essential innocence of life’s experiences.”¹⁰² Other seminarians gave evidence of shifting away from a theistic worldview altogether toward a more individualistic or mystical worldviews that provides an internal self-derived vantage point from which the world can be interpreted. “The self is the locus within which the divine can be found through peak experiences that are grasped intuitively.”¹⁰³ Ultimately, the students’ perspective on God was a blend of culture and the Bible. The intermingling of culture with Scripture, according to Wells, “has produced an understanding of God that is partly biblical (and typically defined in orthodox theological terms) and partly indebted to the presumption of modernity, subordinating a sense of divine transcendence to a sense of divine immanence.”¹⁰⁴

Regarding the age of individualism, students indicated a belief in the relative innocence of the culture—a belief that cultivates an environment for the tremendous embrace of divine immanence. Students indicated “not only a belief that God provides shape and meaning to life through his presence in it but also that they can gain access to

¹⁰¹Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 208-9.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 212.

this meaning through the self.”¹⁰⁵ They assumed that “they are sufficiently innocent to be capable of discerning the meaning of life and simultaneously achieving self-fulfillment through a process of looking within themselves.”¹⁰⁶

One additional study of note is found in Douglas O’Donnell’s *God’s Lyrics: Rediscovering Worship through Old Testament Songs*. Salient to the topic of this study, O’Donnell surveyed the most frequently sung contemporary worship music used by the church from 2000-2008. T. David Gordon, contemporary evangelical theologian and professor, in the foreword to *God’s Lyrics* comments that O’Donnell’s research supports the idea that contemporary Christian songs are characteristically experiential, focused on man’s experience rather than focusing on the activity of God. Also, in the modern song of the church, the one who worships tends to have a more prominent focus than the one worshiped. He proceeds to comment that, as a group, modern worship songs depict the Lion of the Tribe of Judah rather as a domesticated, declawed kitten, a friend to everyone, and an enemy to no one. Gordon states, “He may elicit our affection, but not our awe.”¹⁰⁷

O’Donnell comes to several poignant conclusions as a result of his lyrical analysis. Though many of the top fifty contemporary Christian songs sung from 2000 through 2008 may appear appropriately God focused at first, O’Donnell asserts that the failure of many of those songs is one of definition and emphasis; i.e., they often define God differently from how Scripture defines God.¹⁰⁸ O’Donnell notes the misplaced

¹⁰⁵Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 209.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷O’Donnell, *God’s Lyrics*, xi.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 127-28.

emphasis and heavy use of the words “I,” “my,” and “me” and concluded that in singing a lyric like “Jesus died for me,” the modern song of the church often focuses on the “for me” idea rather than that “Jesus died.”¹⁰⁹ Songs that could otherwise be appropriately God-centered become “confused, if not nullified by the language of the self.”¹¹⁰ O’Donnell infers from his lyrical data analysis that many of the modern contemporary songs of the church are plagued with an intense focus on the individual.¹¹¹ O’Donnell states that the most repeated phrase in the top fifty modern worship songs is “my heart.”¹¹² In addition, O’Donnell believes that his data analysis proved that Christians have stopped singing about God as a righteous judge of the wicked.¹¹³ Finally, O’Donnell concluded that many of the songs in the top fifty lack theological clarity or demonstrate a misunderstanding of sacred history.

Unfortunately, the above two studies are the only such modern studies that remotely connect to the topic of this dissertation: transcendence and immanence represented particularly in worship services within the free church tradition. Many books have been written about the loss of transcendence, the age of the individual, the domestication of God, and the age of immanence. However, as previously noted, most of the assertions contained in these books are simply anecdotal.¹¹⁴ Therefore, I have sought

¹⁰⁹O’Donnell, *God’s Lyrics*, 130.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 128.

¹¹¹For a complete list of O’Donnell’s top fifty songs sung in America Churches from 2000 through 2008, see *God’s Lyrics*, 189-92.

¹¹²O’Donnell, *God’s Lyrics*, 128.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 96.

¹¹⁴In email or direct conversations with David Wells, Sean O’Donnell, and Bruce Ware, all

to substantiate the claim that, in the free evangelical church, particularly Southern Baptist churches, a rush to immanence coupled with a diminishing, diminished, or extinguished understanding of transcendence is a present reality in the corporate worship services of many of these churches. In order to determine if these assertions are true, I designed a research instrument focused on worship pastors of the highest attended Southern Baptist churches in the United States. Why focus on worship pastors rather than worship services? Focusing on worship pastors allowed the research to target the source of worship services in the free church tradition. Worship pastors are the gatekeepers of worship in the free evangelical tradition called Southern Baptists. From their pens and hearts flow the orders of service each week, which feed and shape the spiritual lives of their congregants. The chapter that follows contains the findings of this research: “The Worship Design Project 2014: Survey of Worship Praxis and Design in the Southern Baptist Free Church Tradition.”

were in agreement that no empirical data currently exist to substantiate the claim that the modern evangelical church tends to embrace God’s immanence to the exclusion or diminishment of God’s transcendence.

CHAPTER 3

THE WORSHIP DESIGN PROJECT: SURVEY OF WORSHIP PRAXIS AND DESIGN IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST FREE TRADITION

Introduction to the Research Problem

Many have called for a re-formation of corporate worship in the church of the modern age. Some have asserted that the age of immanence, individualism, and empiricism have entered the church, diminishing or nullifying the acknowledgment or awareness of God's mysterious transcendence in the church's worship. Others contend that the church views God as too small, alleging that the church has moved away from thinking about God in his wholly otherness and instead has chosen to embrace God's immanent nearness without an appropriate interpretive framework for his transcendence. This portion of this dissertation attempts to either substantiate or refute these claims levied against churches, specifically those churches in the Southern Baptist Convention who possess great freedom in how corporate worship services are designed and ordered.

Do corporate worship services show signs of capitulation to the age of immanence? Is the church's view of God expressed in worship tilted toward his immanence? Instead of investigating how Southern Baptist church members view God or how church members perceive God as portrayed through the worship services they attend, I will focus specifically on the design philosophy and methodology of the people who sculpt services of worship—the worship pastors. It is their underlying goals and value systems that ultimately give form, shape, and content to the worship expressions of the

church week by week. Their guiding philosophies and objectives ultimately determine how God is characterized through a service of worship.

Research Assumptions

The following research assumptions are foundational to this study:

1. Other than the senior pastor, the worship pastor is the most influential person to the corporate worship life of the gathered communities of Christians in Southern Baptist churches in the United States.
2. Other than the senior pastor, the worship pastor is the most determinative person of what songs or other elements are selected for inclusion in services of worship in Southern Baptist churches in the United States.
3. The sequence of a worship service communicates value and meaning to a worship service and is, therefore, consequential.
4. Other than the senior pastor, the worship pastor exerts the largest amount of influence over liturgical sequencing for services of worship in Southern Baptist churches in the United States.
5. The goals, values, and objectives regarding worship service design held by a worship pastor influence a congregant's view of God, a congregant's public and private expression of praise and adoration to God, and a congregant's understanding of himself or herself in relationship to God. Therefore, the liturgical choices made by a worship pastor are consequential.

Research Purposes

Believing that every choice made by a worship pastor is governed by a guiding philosophy, a held value, or a prime objective, the aim of this research was to discover the specific influencers that affect worship design and subsequent practice in Southern Baptist churches. More specifically, the purpose of this quantitative research was to examine (1) how worship pastors select the elements to be included in their services of worship and (2) how worship pastors sequentially order the elements once they have been selected. This research also sought to discern what role, if any, the specific concepts of

transcendence and immanence play in how worship pastors select and order liturgical elements (e.g., songs, prayers, Scripture readings, etc.) included in a worship service.

Hypothesis

My hypothesis suggests that the concept of God's transcendence is not embraced as a meaningful category that influences how worship pastors select songs or other worship elements to be included in their worship services. In addition, I also submit that the sequential order of worship services is not influenced by the goal, value, or objective of thinking about God first in his transcendent otherness and subsequently in his immanent nearness.

Design Overview

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design using a survey instrument composed primarily of closed-ended questions distributed to worship pastors of Southern Baptist churches in the United States.

Terminology

For the purposes of this research, I used the following these terms defined as follows:

Free church tradition. The free church tradition describes churches whose worship forms, content, and praxis are not fixed, mandated, or governed by an ecclesial body external to the individual local church. Worship in Southern Baptist churches would be considered "free."¹

¹Christopher Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 25-35.

Immanence. Immanence is a term that describes God's love, care, and concern for his creation and his nearness to his creation.²

Liturgical. Liturgical means pertaining to that which is included in an organized public worship service.³

Liturgy. Liturgy is a term used to describe the order of service for Christian worship.⁴

Main campus. In relationship to a church whose corporate worship services are conducted at multiple locations, this term refers to the location a church would consider to be its home base of operation.

Normal or typical weekend service. A typical/normal weekend service is defined as a worship service that is not seasonally influenced (e.g., Christmas or Easter) or a worship service that is not influenced by a special emphasis (e.g., Sanctity of Life Sunday).

Southern Baptist churches. Southern Baptist churches are a group of autonomous congregations primarily located in the United States who are in voluntary cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention and typically adhere to the convictions stated in *The Baptist Faith and Message*.⁵

²Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 267-71; see also Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 35.

³Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 18.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Southern Baptist Convention, A Closer Look, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/acloserlook.asp>.

Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is a group of ministries supported by a network of worldwide cooperating evangelical Baptist churches committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the “promotion of Christian missions at home and abroad and any other objects such as Christian education, benevolent enterprises, and social services which it may deem proper and advisable for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God.”⁶

Transcendence. Transcendence is a term that describes God’s distinction and separation from his people, his “wholly otherness” from his creation.⁷

Worship Pastor. Worship Pastor is a title used to describe the person who serves on the pastoral staff of a Southern Baptist church whose primary responsibility is to plan and lead corporate worship services. The following titles and their variations are used interchangeably throughout this research: Worship Pastor, Worship Leader, Minister of Music and Worship, and Worship/Creative Arts Pastor.

Methodological Design

The methodological design used to conduct this study will be delineated in the following sections: the research questions, procedural overview, sample and delimitations, limitations of generalizations of findings, research instrumentation, field-testing, and procedures used to conduct the study.

⁶Southern Baptist Convention, Constitution, Article II, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/legal/constitution.asp>.

⁷Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 267-71; see also Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 35.

Research Questions

The following six questions formed the basis for the research conducted in this study:

1. Is representing God in his transcendent otherness a goal, value, or objective that strongly influences how worship pastors select worship songs or other elements to be included in their worship services?
2. If representing God's transcendence is not influential in the selection of worship songs or other elements to be included in worship services, what are the goals, values, or objectives that most strongly influence how a worship pastor selects worship songs or other elements to be included in his or her worship service?
3. Do worship service beginnings show evidence of being influenced by a goal, value, or objective held by the worship pastor that purposes to represent God in his transcendent otherness?
4. If the worship service beginnings do not represent God in his transcendent otherness, how do worship pastors most often initially represent God?
5. Is the sequential ordering of a worship service influenced by a goal, value, or objective held by the worship pastor that would necessitate representing God in his transcendent otherness prior to representing God in his immanent nearness?
6. If the sequential ordering of a worship service does not reflect the priority of representing God in his transcendent otherness prior to his immanent nearness, what are the goals, values, or objectives that most influence the way worship pastors sequence the elements of their worship services?

Procedural Overview

First, a list of the largest Southern Baptist churches based on average weekly worship attendance was obtained from LifeWay Christian Resources headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee. The weekly worship attendance numbers are self-reported annually by participating Southern Baptist churches through an instrument called the

“Annual Church Profile” (ACP).⁸ A target subset of 547 Southern Baptist churches was identified. These 547 churches were reported by Lifeway Christian Resources to have an average weekly worship attendance of greater than 1,100. My research assistant, Cody Libolt, secured discoverable names, addresses, and email addresses of the worship pastors in the target subset.

Next, a survey instrument called the Worship Design Project 2014 was created to collect data regarding the goals, values, and objectives that influence how worship pastors in Southern Baptist churches select and sequence the elements of their services of worship. The research survey was administered to worship pastors in the target subset of churches via Internet.

Finally, data were collected and subsequently analyzed through a variety of statistical measures appropriate to the format of each survey question. Analysis included descriptive statistics using mean (average), media (middle point), range (low to high values), and quartiles to report frequency responses and central tendencies.⁹

⁸“The ACP is an annual census of Southern Baptist congregations (churches and church-type missions), associations, and state conventions whose purpose is the (1) enumeration of each congregation along with the identification of its affiliations, (2) securing of basic statistical information (using specific uniform definitions), and (3) securing of name/address information for specific congregational staff positions, lay congregational positions, and associational positions. This definition of the ACP was provided by Tim Davis, Church Analytics and Insights Specialist, LifeWay Church Resources, Nashville, TN, via email on May 2, 2014.

⁹Assistance with statistical analysis of the data collected in the Worship Design Project 2014 was provided by Steven McCord, Analysis Services Team, Global Research Department, International Mission Board, Richmond, VA. Also, Cody Libolt served as research assistant to Charles Lewis for the Worship Design Project 2014. The researcher engaged in frequent phone calls, emails, and/or face-to-face meetings with Libolt and McCord to ensure fidelity of processes, clarity of objective(s), quality of final products, and integrity of reporting.

Sample and Delimitations

Recognizing the enormity of the scope and size of a sample population that would include all of the worship pastors of the Southern Baptist churches in the United States (over 46,000 churches¹⁰), the research sample was delimited to a smaller subset of Southern Baptist churches selected for invitation to participate. Assuming that most larger Southern Baptist churches would have a minimum of one staff person devoted to worship planning and design, I chose to invite the worship pastors of churches whose average weekly attendance is greater than 1,100. This represented the top 547 most attended Southern Baptist churches in the United States according to the 2012 ACP.¹¹ As reported by LifeWay Christian Resources, the average attendance range of the top 547 churches during the reporting period was from 1,101 to 27,158. For a complete list of churches invited to participate in the Worship Design Project, please see appendix 3.

Limitations and Generalizations of Findings

The findings from this study may be generalized to all Southern Baptist churches in the United States whose average weekly attendance is greater than 1,100.¹²

¹⁰The 2013 ACP indicates the total number of Southern Baptist churches to be 46,125. This information was provided via email by Paula Hancock, Lifeway Christian Resources, Nashville, TN.

¹¹The top 547 most attended Southern Baptist churches recorded an average weekly attendance greater than 1,100 for the reporting calendar year of 2012 as indicated in the 2012 Annual Church Profile (ACP) published by Lifeway Christian Resources. The 2012 ACP census data were used to compile the prospect list of churches to be invited to participate in the Worship Design Project. At the time of compilation, the 2013 or 2014 ACP data were not available. However, the Worship Design Project survey and subsequent responses from qualifying worship pastors were received during the 2014 calendar year.

¹²LifeWay Christian Resources, the originating source of the data used to define the sample strata that would be surveyed, defined “weekly worship attendance” as the average number of people in attendance in a church’s weekly (primary) worship service(s). If this number was not recorded, churches were requested to report their attendance for the last Sunday of the reporting year.

Research Instrumentation— The Worship Design Project 2014

At the time of this research, no known research instrument existed to ascertain the values, goals, and objectives that might influence how a worship pastor selects and sequences songs or other elements to be included in the corporate worship services of Southern Baptist churches. Therefore, a new instrument called the Worship Design Project 2014 (henceforth referred to as the WDP) was created to attempt to discern what factors influence how worship pastors design corporate worship services for their churches.¹³

The WDP is a survey-based research instrument comprised of twenty-nine questions with primarily closed-ended response choices crafted to determine the goals, values, and objectives that influence a worship pastor's choice of worship elements and how those worship elements are sequentially ordered. In addition, the WDP specifically sought to discover if the categories of God's transcendence and God's immanence influence the selection of liturgical elements by worship pastors and how these elements are sequenced. The WDP research instrument was created using SurveyMonkey, a web-based application located at www.surveymonkey.com.

A panel of experts in the field of Christian Worship—Greg Brewton, Joseph Crider, and Esther Crookshank—were assembled to assess the internal and external validity, reliability, and potential of each question to assess the goals, values, and objectives that might influence a worship pastor's selection and ordering of worship

¹³For a full report of all questions and survey responses, please refer to appendix 1.

songs and other elements. Additionally, the expert panel examined response options to ensure clarity, neutrality, relevance, and appropriate spectrum.¹⁴

Field-Testing and Approval of the WDP

The WDP was field-tested through the use of a beta-test version of the survey instrument administered via Internet at four separate time intervals to each of the four groups listed below:

1. Field-Testing Group Level 1—Undergraduate students majoring in Worship and Music Studies or Worship and Pastoral Studies at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky
2. Field-Testing Group Level 2—Graduate students pursuing the Master of Divinity in Worship Leadership, the Master of Arts in Worship Leadership, or the Master of Arts in Church Music at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky
3. Field-Testing Group Level 3—Part-time worship pastors in Southern Baptist churches
4. Field-Testing Group Level 4—Full-time worship pastors or worship associates in Southern Baptist and non-Southern Baptist churches who were not eligible to participate in the WDP

Each group provided valuable feedback regarding clarity, accuracy, scope, completeness, and relevance of the WDP questions and response options. In addition, each field-testing group was asked to report procedural, mechanical, or clarity issues with the survey instrument. Revisions to the WDP were made after each field test was complete. After field-testing was complete and multiple revisions concluded, the WDP

¹⁴Gregory B. Brewton serves as the Carolyn King Ragan Associate Professor of Church Music and Worship and Chair of the Department of Biblical Worship at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Joseph R. Crider serves as the Ernest and Mildred Hogan Professor of Church Music and Worship and the Executive Director of the Institute for Biblical Worship at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Esther R. Crookshank serves as the Ollie Hale Chiles Professor of Church Music and the Director of the Academy of Sacred Music at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

was submitted to the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for assessment. Upon approval, permission was granted to conduct this research and to use human subjects as the source of data.¹⁵

Finally, the revised WDP research instrument was submitted to and approved by the aforementioned panel of experts as well as the supervising professor for this dissertation, Bruce A. Ware, T. Rupert and Lucille Coleman Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Procedures

Beginning on May 22, 2014, an introductory letter was mailed via the United States Postal Service to each worship pastor at the 547 qualifying Southern Baptist churches in the United States whose weekly average attendance was self-reported to LifeWay Christian Resources to be greater than 1,100. Next, all worship pastors of the 547 churches with identifiable email addresses were emailed up to four invitations to participate in the WDP. Worship pastors with undiscoverable email addresses were sent a second letter via the United States Postal Service with an invitation containing a URL to participate in the WDP. The opportunity for participation in the WDP officially closed on Friday, October 17, 2014 at 5:00 PM. Documentation of mail and email correspondence to worship pastors can be found in appendix 4.

Collection protocol. Invited worship pastors accessed the WDP research instrument exclusively via Internet web access. Upon opening the survey, each worship

¹⁵See appendix 2 to view the Ethics Committee's approval letter.

pastor was presented with the purpose for the research followed by an agreement to participate. Then, each worship pastor was screened with the following two initial questions providing confirmation of two key qualifying factors:

1. Are you the person who most influences worship service planning, ordering, and design (other than your senior pastor)?
2. Please confirm that your church is a Southern Baptist or Southern Baptist-affiliated church.

Only worship pastors who answered both questions above in the affirmative were eligible to participate in this research.

Once qualified, the WDP survey instrument asked a series of questions about the worship pastor's church demographics, worship style, worship leadership, worship practices, worship service planning, and worship service sequential ordering.

Recognizing that many churches meet in multiple locations and offer many worship service options, worship pastors were asked to restrict the sphere of consideration for their responses to their most attended weekend worship service on their church's main campus. The main campus was defined for the worship pastors as the physical building(s) that the church would define as the location for its primary base of operation. Also, worship pastors were asked to sharply focus their responses by thinking only about their worship services planned for a normal or typical weekend, i.e., a service not influenced by a seasonal emphasis (e.g., Christmas or Easter) or a special emphasis (e.g., Sanctity of Life Sunday).

Upon completion of the WDP, the worship pastor was then invited to submit a sample order of service to be included in this dissertation for the purposes of creating a snapshot of services of worship occurring in Southern Baptist churches across the United

States in 2014. Fifty-one worship pastors submitted a representative order of service from their church. These orders of service may be found in appendix 5.

Compilation protocol. All respondent data were collected through a web-based survey instrument. Data were captured, stored, and analyzed using Excel database software. Assistance with analysis of the data using primarily descriptive statistics was provided by Steven McCord, statistical analyst for the Global Research Department of the International Mission Board in Richmond, Virginia. All calculations have been rounded to a single decimal point.

Of the 547 churches invited to participate in the WDP, twelve respondents were disqualified because their churches are no longer identified with the Southern Baptist Convention. Two survey respondents were disqualified because they were unable to confirm that they were the most influential person other than their senior pastor on worship service planning, ordering, and design. Five respondents were disqualified because of incomplete survey submissions. The survey had a response rate of 48.8% with 267 qualified worship pastors successfully completing the WDP and 261 worship pastors declining to respond. The sample size of 267 yielded a 95% confidence level with a .05 confidence interval. Table 1 presents the data related to the sample population:

Table 1. Overview of Sample

<i>Description of Population</i>	<i>Exclusions</i>	<i>Population</i>
SBC churches identified by Lifeway Christian Resources with attendance over 1,100		547
Not self-identified as a Southern Baptist church	12	
Not the most influential person in worship design	2	
Incomplete survey	5	
Non-response	261	
Total qualified responses, n=		267

For a comprehensive list of churches that successfully completed the WDP research instrument, please see appendix 3.

Analysis of Findings

The WDP was designed with the following eight parts:

1. Purpose and Agreement To Participate
2. Preliminary Considerations
3. General Information and Characterizations Regarding the Primary Worship Service
4. Worship Service Content and Leadership
5. How Worship Service Elements Are Selected
6. How Worship Services Are Begun
7. How Worship Service Elements Are Sequentially Ordered
8. Personal Information about the Worship Pastor

Parts 5, 6, and 7 are the most directly consequential to the purposes of this study and serve to provide empirical data to answer RQ1-2, RQ3-4, and RQ5-6, respectively.¹⁶ Each part contains questions designed to identify the underlying guiding thoughts, influencing value systems, and priorities that shape a worship pastor's decision-making process regarding the elements he chooses to include in a worship service and how he chooses to sequence those elements.¹⁷ Parts 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8 of the WDP provide useful information related to demographics and metrics, longevity of the worship pastor, length and content of worship services, style and leadership of worship services, and

¹⁶RQ is an abbreviation for "research question." RQ1-6 are listed on p. 57.

¹⁷The terms *goals*, *values*, and *objectives* are used synonymously throughout the WDP research instrument. They refer to any underlying philosophy, priority, principle, or conviction that influences a worship pastor's liturgical choices and sequential design.

planning of worship services. Though only Parts 5, 6, and 7 will be explored in depth here, all questions and answers for all eight parts are accessible in appendix 1.

Questions related to Parts 5, 6, and 7 of the WDP will be labeled with the corresponding question number found in the actual research instrument. For example, “Q16” will indicate question sixteen in the Worship Design Project 2014 research instrument. The analysis of findings will be presented in the following sequence:

(1) “How Worship Elements Are Selected”¹⁸ with presentation and analysis of Q16, Q17, RQ1, and RQ2, (2) “How Worship Services Are Begun”¹⁹ with presentation and analysis of Q18, Q19, Q20, RQ3, and RQ4, and “How Worship Service Elements Are Sequentially Ordered”²⁰ with presentation and analysis of Q22, Q23, Q24, RQ5 and RQ6.

How Worship Elements Are Selected (WDP Part 5)

The survey questions in Part 5 of the WDP were designed to discern the underlying goals and value systems that influence a worship pastor’s selection of songs and other worship elements to be included in a service of worship.

Presentation of Q16 and response bank. Worship pastors were asked to respond to the following question:

Q16. What are the goals, values, or objectives that influence your selection process? Please rank each of the following goals/values/objectives on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 indicating no influence and 5 indicating the strongest influence on how/why you select elements that will comprise your worship service?

¹⁸Corresponds to Part 5 of the WDP and RQ1-2.

¹⁹Corresponds to Part 6 of the WDP and RQ3-4.

²⁰Corresponds to Part 7 of the WDP and RQ5-6.

Using the rating scale of (1) *no influence* – (2) *slight influence* – (3) *moderate influence* – (4) *strong influence* – (5) *very strong influence*, worship pastors identified the level of influence that certain goals, values, or objectives have on their worship planning process, specifically on how songs or other worship elements are *selected* to be included in a worship service. The following response bank was offered:

1. Popularity of a song based on rankings from Praise Charts, Planning Center, CCLI, etc.
2. The song's style, key, tempo, or singability
3. To call the lost to repentance, salvation, and faith
4. To call the saved to holiness and repentance
5. To celebrate/rehearse the gospel (Christ lived, Christ died, Christ rose, Christ is coming again)
6. To connect with the culture
7. To convey God's immanence (his love, care, and concern for his people)
8. To convey God's transcendence (his distinction and separateness from his people)
9. To engage the heart and express human emotion (e.g., joy, celebration, contrition, desperation, thanksgiving, awe, wonder, etc.)
10. To honor the congregation's expectations, preferences, and traditions
11. To stimulate the mind with theologically rich content
12. To support the theme of the pastor's sermon or series
13. Other

Table 2 indicates the worship pastor's perception of the relative strength of the goals, values, or objectives listed above on how or why elements are selected to be included in a worship service.

Table 2. Goals, values, or objectives that influence how or why elements are selected to be included in a worship service (Q16)

<i>Influential Goals, Values, or Objectives</i>	<i>No Influence</i>		<i>Slight Influence</i>		<i>Moderate Influence</i>		<i>Strong Influence</i>		<i>Very Strong Influence</i>		<i>Count n=</i>
	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	
Popularity of a song	85	32.0	79	29.7	60	22.6	36	13.5	6	2.3	266
Song's style, key, tempo	4	1.5	12	4.5	52	19.5	134	50.2	65	24.3	267
To call the lost to repentance	6	2.3	30	11.3	70	26.4	100	37.7	59	22.3	265
To call the saved to holiness	3	1.1	17	6.4	53	19.9	126	47.4	67	25.2	266
To celebrate/rehearse the gospel	2	0.8	5	1.9	26	9.8	100	37.7	132	49.8	265
To connect with culture	12	4.5	58	21.7	99	37.1	79	29.6	19	7.1	267
To convey God's immanence	2	0.8	6	2.3	34	12.8	129	48.5	95	35.7	266
To convey God's transcendence	10	3.7	28	10.5	66	24.7	98	36.7	65	24.3	267
To engage the heart	3	1.1	5	1.9	45	16.9	111	41.7	102	38.3	266
To honor traditions	36	13.6	88	33.2	100	37.7	31	11.7	10	3.8	265
To theologically stimulate the mind	15	5.6	15	5.6	80	30.1	98	36.8	58	21.8	266
To support the sermon series/theme	8	3.0	40	15.2	57	21.6	86	32.6	73	27.7	264
Other ²¹	6	2.2	2	0.7	7	2.6	9	3.4	16	6.0	40 (267)

(The first number in each category represents the number of responses. The second number represents the response percentage calculated as a function of “count.”)

Analysis of responses to Q16. Q16 offered worship pastors the opportunity to reflect on a series of factors and their potential influence on their own worship planning. Specifically, the purpose of Q16 was to assist worship pastors in thinking categorically in

²¹For a clearer representation of this category, the percentages for “Other” have been calculated using n=267 rather than n=40. The decision to use n=267 was based upon a total of 267 worship pastors who responded to this question.

terms of what values, goals, or objectives are at work in their selection process of elements to be included in a worship service. The data presented in table 2 indicate a variety of potential influences that may affect a worship pastor’s liturgical choices. The top three strongest (“very strong”) goals, values, or objectives are celebrating/rehearsing the gospel (49.8%), engaging the heart (38.3%), and conveying God’s immanence (35.7%).

Figure 1 reflects the *aggregate* scores for the two highest categories of influence—the combined responses to the categories of “strong influence” and “very strong influence” noted in table 2.

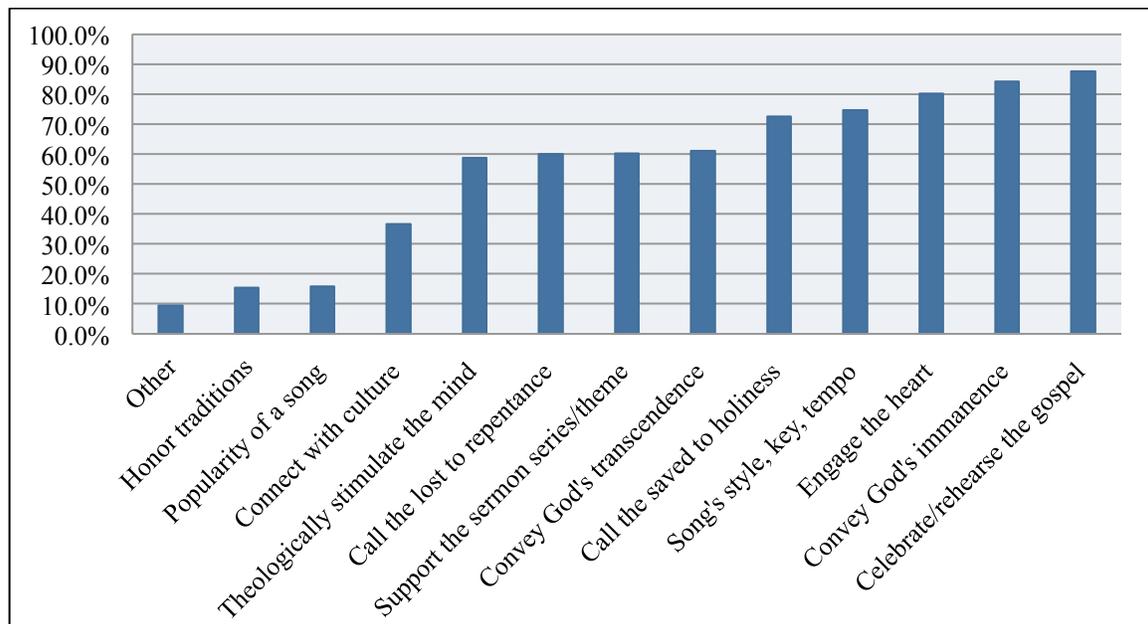


Figure 1. Goals, values, or objectives ranked as *strong* or *very strong* that influence the selection of worship elements (Q16)

The data represented by figure 1 indicate nine factors selected by over half of the worship pastors as strong or very strong. These factors include celebrating/rehearsing the gospel

(87.5%), conveying God's immanence (84.2%), engaging the hearts of their congregations (80.1%), musical considerations like a song's style, key, or tempo (74.5%), calling their congregations to holiness (72.6%), conveying God's transcendence (61.0%), supporting the theme of the pastor's message or series (60.2%), calling the lost to repentance and faith (60.0%), and stimulating the mind with theologically rich content (58.6%).

Because two-thirds of all factors offered in the response bank were rated by a large majority of worship pastors as significantly influential to their selection of worship elements, this question in isolation does not provide definitive information about which specific goals, objectives, or values are *most* operative in the worship planning process. The descriptive conclusion that can be drawn from Q16 is that a majority of worship pastors are not strongly influenced by the goal of connecting with the culture (36.7%), selecting songs based on their popularity (15.8%), or honoring the congregation's expectations, preferences, and traditions (15.5%). To gain additional clarity, Q17 was written to assist worship pastors in discerning which factors most influence their choices of elements to be included in a worship service.

Presentation of Q17. To attain a more descriptive and definitive picture of which goals, values, or objectives are dominantly operational in the worship service planning process, worship pastors were asked to take the same list of goals, values, and objectives outlined in Q16 and rate them using the following ranking system: *most influential – 2nd most influential – 3rd most influential*. The results are recorded in table 3.

Table 3. Ranked goals, values, or objectives that most influence the selection of worship elements (Q17)

<i>Goals, Values, and Objectives</i>	<i>Most Influential</i>		<i>2nd Most Influential</i>		<i>3rd Most Influential</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Popularity of a song	2	0.8	3	1.1	6	2.3
Song's style, key, tempo	12	4.5	36	13.7	59	22.4
Call the lost to repentance	11	4.1	21	8.0	12	4.6
Call the saved to holiness	8	3.0	17	6.5	14	5.3
Celebrate/rehearse the gospel	97	36.5	38	14.4	15	5.7
Connect with culture	2	0.8	12	4.6	23	8.7
Convey God's immanence	20	7.5	24	9.1	29	11.0
Convey God's transcendence	2	0.8	9	3.4	11	4.2
Engage the heart	45	16.9	48	18.3	36	13.7
Honor traditions	0	0.0	5	1.9	7	2.7
Theologically stimulate the mind	7	2.6	20	7.6	22	8.4
Support the sermon series/theme	48	18.0	28	10.6	27	10.3
Other	12	4.5	2	0.8	2	0.8
Count n=	266		263		263	

(The first number in each category represents the number of responses. The second number represents the response percentage calculated as a function of "count.")

Analysis of responses to Q17. Q17 required worship pastors to assess which goals, values, or objectives are most operative in their worship planning processes, specifically in how worship elements are selected. Figure 2 represents their responses.

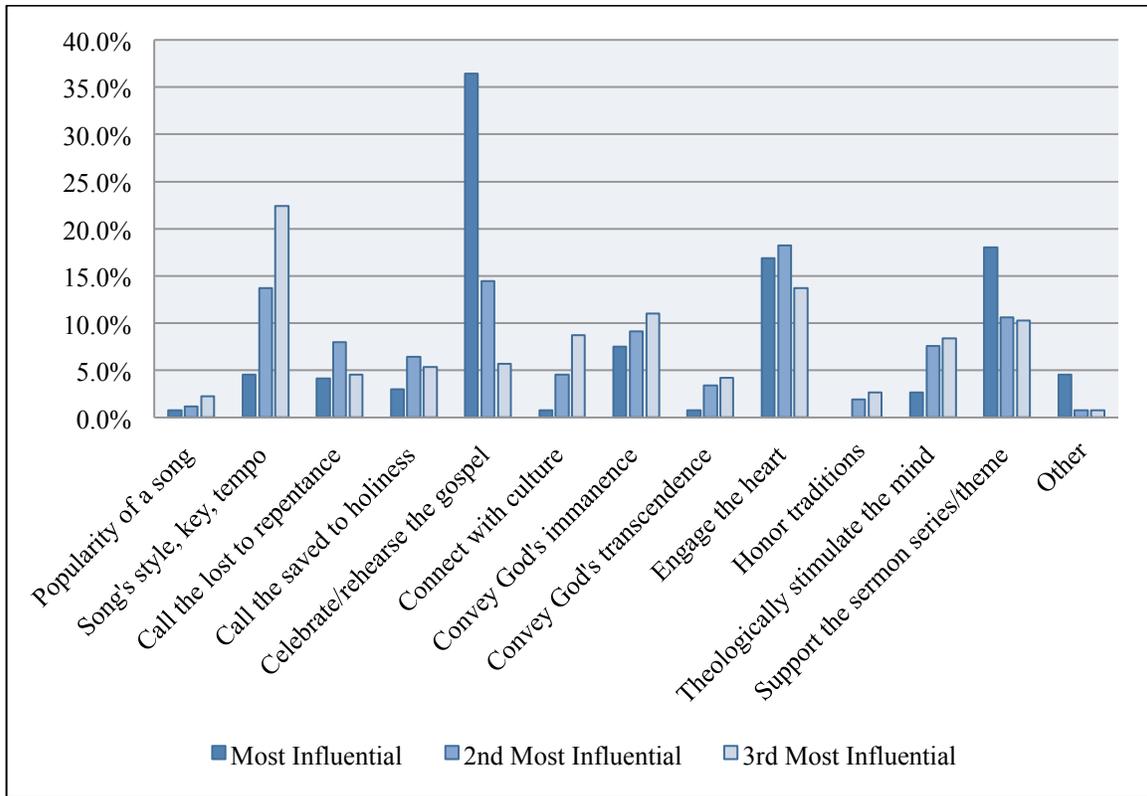


Figure 2. Goals, values, or objectives that *most*, *2nd most*, and *3rd most* influence the selection of worship elements (Q17)

The data in figure 2 show that the most influential factors that guide a worship pastor's process for selection of worship elements are celebrating/rehearsing the gospel (36.5%), supporting the theme of the pastor's message (18.0%), engaging the heart (16.9%), and conveying God's immanent love, care and concern for his people (7.5%). Twice as many worship pastors indicate the priority of celebrating/rehearsing the gospel over supporting the sermon theme and engaging the heart. Also, twice as many worship pastors selected supporting the sermon series and engaging the heart over conveying God's immanence.

Greater clarity is achieved regarding the strength of influence when the most influential, 2nd most influential, and 3rd most influential goals, values, and objectives are considered collectively as indicated in table 4. The “combined score” data point is the summation of the most influential, 2nd most influential, and 3rd most influential response counts. The “composite %” data point represents the combined response percentage which has been calculated as a function of the average number of total respondents, n=264.

Table 4. Composite of most, 2nd most, and 3rd most influential goals, values, and objectives (Q17)

<i>Goals, Values, and Objectives</i>	<i>Composite Score</i>	<i>Composite %</i>
Popularity of a song	11	4.2
Song’s style, key, tempo	107	40.5
To call the lost to repentance	44	16.7
To call the saved to holiness	39	14.8
To celebrate/rehearse the gospel	150	56.8
To connect with culture	37	14.0
To convey God’s immanence	73	27.7
To convey God’s transcendence	22	8.3
To engage the heart	129	48.9
To honor traditions	12	4.5
To stimulate the mind	49	18.6
To support the theme	103	39.0
Other	16	6.1
Average Number of Total Responses	264	

Figure 3 visually represents the composite data contained in table 4 ordered from lowest impact to highest impact.

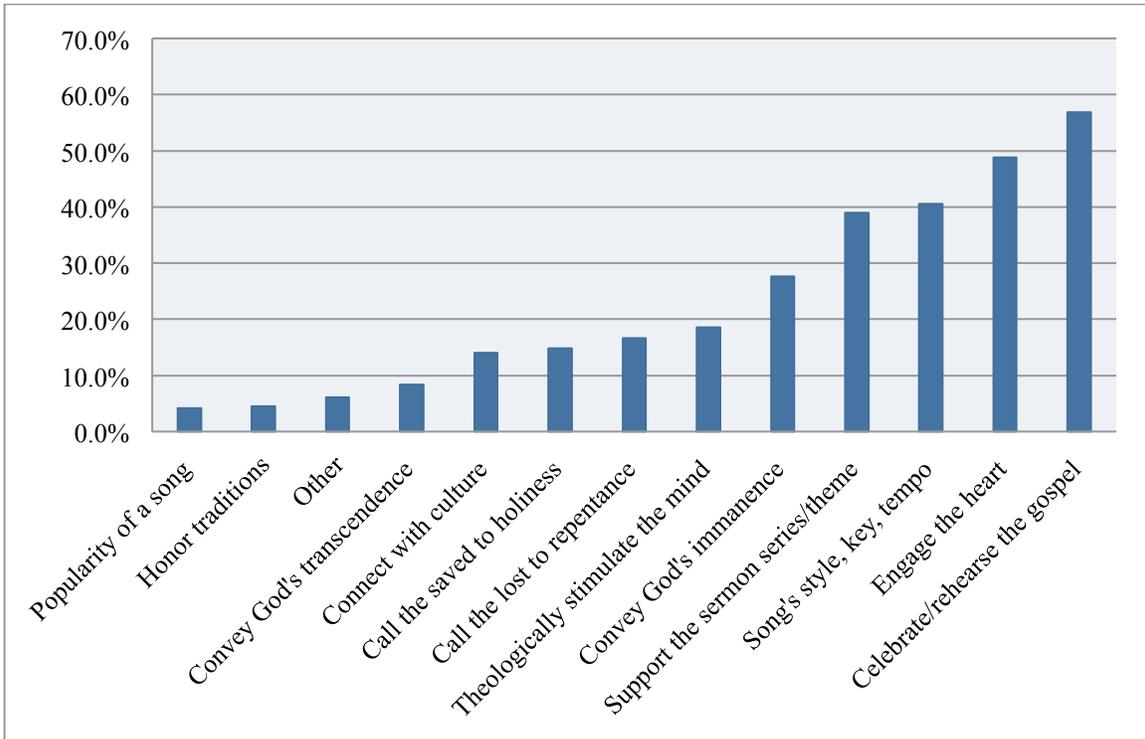


Figure 3. Composite of the top three most influential goals, values, or objectives that influence the selection of worship elements by worship pastors (Q17)

Celebrating the gospel (Christ lived, Christ died, Christ rose, Christ is coming again) is clearly the most impactful and foundational value governing how worship pastors select elements to be included in their services of worship. Enabling the heart to express joy, celebration, contrition, desperation, thanksgiving, awe, wonder, and other human emotions ranks as the second most influential goal of worship pastors. Musical considerations such as a song's style, key, tempo, or singability ranks third.

Analysis related to RQ1 and RQ2. Of special note for this dissertation’s research is the relative strength or weakness of the priority of conveying God’s transcendence. Hence, RQ1 asks the following: “Is representing God in his transcendent otherness a goal, value, or objective that strongly influences how worship pastors select songs or other elements to be included in their worship services?” Although conveying God’s transcendence was generally valued like many of the other potential influential factors, ultimately transcendence was not selected as most influential to the process of planning worship services (see Q17 and figure 3). Conveying God’s distinction and separateness from his people (transcendence) received a composite ranking position of tenth place (out of twelve), and only 8.3% of respondents ranked it as one of their top three influential elements when planning a worship service.

Figure 4 vividly illustrates that conveying God’s transcendence usually is *not* the *most* influential goal, value, or objective that influences how worship services are planned. In addition, transcendence tends *not* to be chosen as one of the top three most influential factors in worship service planning as indicated in figure 5.

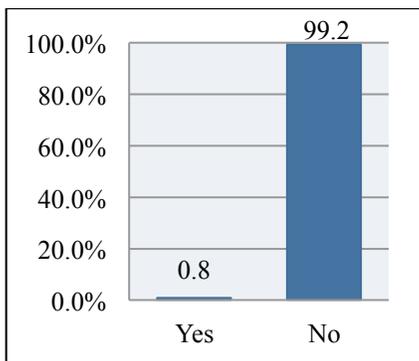


Figure 4. Was transcendence indicated as the *most* influential factor in worship planning?

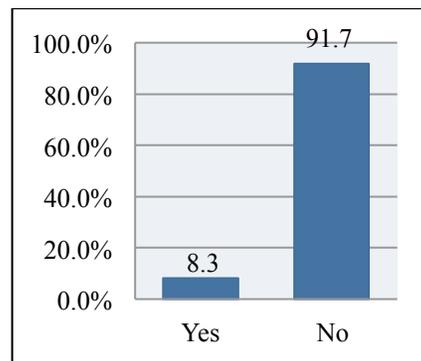


Figure 5. Was transcendence indicated as one of the top three most influential factors in worship planning?

RQ2 asks: “If representing God’s transcendence is not influential in the selection of worship songs or other elements to be included in worship services, what are the goals, values, or objectives that most strongly influence how a worship pastor selects worship songs or other elements to be included in his or her worship service?” Using the composite scores presented in table 4, the following are the top five responses in ranking order:

1. To celebrate/rehearse the gospel—Christ lived, Christ died, Christ rose, Christ is coming again (56.8%)
2. To engage the heart and express human emotion—e.g., joy, celebration, contrition, desperation, thanksgiving, awe, wonder, etc. (48.9%)
3. The song’s style, key, tempo, or singability (40.5%)
4. To support the theme of the pastor's sermon or series (39.0%)
5. To convey God's immanence—his love, care, and concern for his people (27.7%)

Of special interest to this dissertation is the relative strength of the influence of conveying God’s immanence compared to the relative weakness of conveying God’s transcendence. The influence of thinking about God’s love, care, and concern for his people (immanence) ranks in the top five influencers whereas conveying God’s distinction and separateness from his people (transcendence) ranks in the bottom five. Using the metrics presented in table 4, conveying God’s immanence is three times more likely to influence worship planning than conveying God’s transcendence. It is also notable that nine other goals, values, and objectives rank higher than conveying God’s transcendence. Only two categories rank lower than transcendence in influence: honoring the traditions of a congregation and the popularity of a song.

Worship Service Beginnings (WDP Part 6)

The survey questions in Part 6 of the WDP were designed to discern how worship pastors commonly begin their worship services. Worship service beginnings were defined as those things that typically occur during the first ten minutes of a worship service.

Presentation of Q18 and response bank. Worship pastors were asked to respond to the following:

Q18. Worship service beginnings: Please characterize the focus of the elements that most often occur within the first five-ten minutes of your most attended service.

The following characterizations were offered in the response bank:

1. Dedication/commitment
2. Confession/repentance
3. Announcements/greetings/verbal intros
4. Adoration/celebration of God's love and care for his creation (immanence)
5. Contemplation/reflection
6. Thanksgiving
7. Adoration/celebration of God's distinction and separateness from his people/creation (transcendence)
8. Adoration/celebration of Christ, the cross, and the gospel
9. Other

Using the rating scale of *never – rarely – sometimes – frequently – always*, table 5 demonstrates how worship pastors characterized the elements that comprise the corpus of their worship service beginnings.

Table 5. Worship service beginnings (Q18)

Worship Service Beginnings	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Frequently		Always		Count n=
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Dedication/ Commitment	38	15.5	102	41.6	67	27.3	32	13.1	6	2.4	245
Confession/ Repentance	43	17.3	116	46.8	64	25.8	20	8.1	5	2.0	248
Announcements/ Greetings	16	6.2	37	14.3	38	14.7	61	23.6	106	41.1	258
Adoration/ Celebration of God's Immanence	1	0.4	4	1.6	56	21.7	150	58.1	47	18.2	258
Contemplation/ Reflection	27	11.1	108	44.3	78	32.0	25	10.2	6	2.5	244
Thanksgiving	2	0.8	10	3.9	70	27.2	143	55.6	32	12.5	257
Adoration/ Celebration of God's Transcendence	5	1.9	26	10.0	61	23.5	130	50.0	38	14.6	260
Adoration/ Celebration of the Gospel	0	0.0	6	2.3	33	12.6	158	60.5	64	24.5	261
Other ²²	3	1.1	1	0.4	2	0.8	10	3.8	7	2.6	23 (265)

(The first number in each category represents the number of responses. The second number represents the response percentage calculated as a function of “count.”)

Analysis of responses to Q18. Q18 began a series of three questions that sought to discover the characteristic focus of elements that worship pastors select to begin a worship service. The data indicate a variety of focal points that always characterize worship service beginnings. Figure 6 shows that in 41.1% of worship services, announcements, greetings, and verbal introductions *always* occur within the first ten minutes. Elements characterized by adoration and celebration of Christ, the cross,

²²For a clearer representation of this category, the percentages for “Other” have been calculated using n=265 rather than n=23. The decision to use n=265 was based upon a total of 265 worship pastors of 267 who responded to this question.

and the gospel always are a part of 24.5% of worship service beginnings.²³ Elements characterized by God’s love and care for his creation (immanence) always occur in the beginning minutes of 18.2% of worship services. Elements characterized by God’s distinction and separateness from his creation are always found in 14.6% of worship service beginnings. Elements characterized by thanksgiving always occur in 12.5% of worship service beginnings. Contemplation, reflection, dedication, commitment, confession, and repentance rarely characterize the first ten minutes of most services.

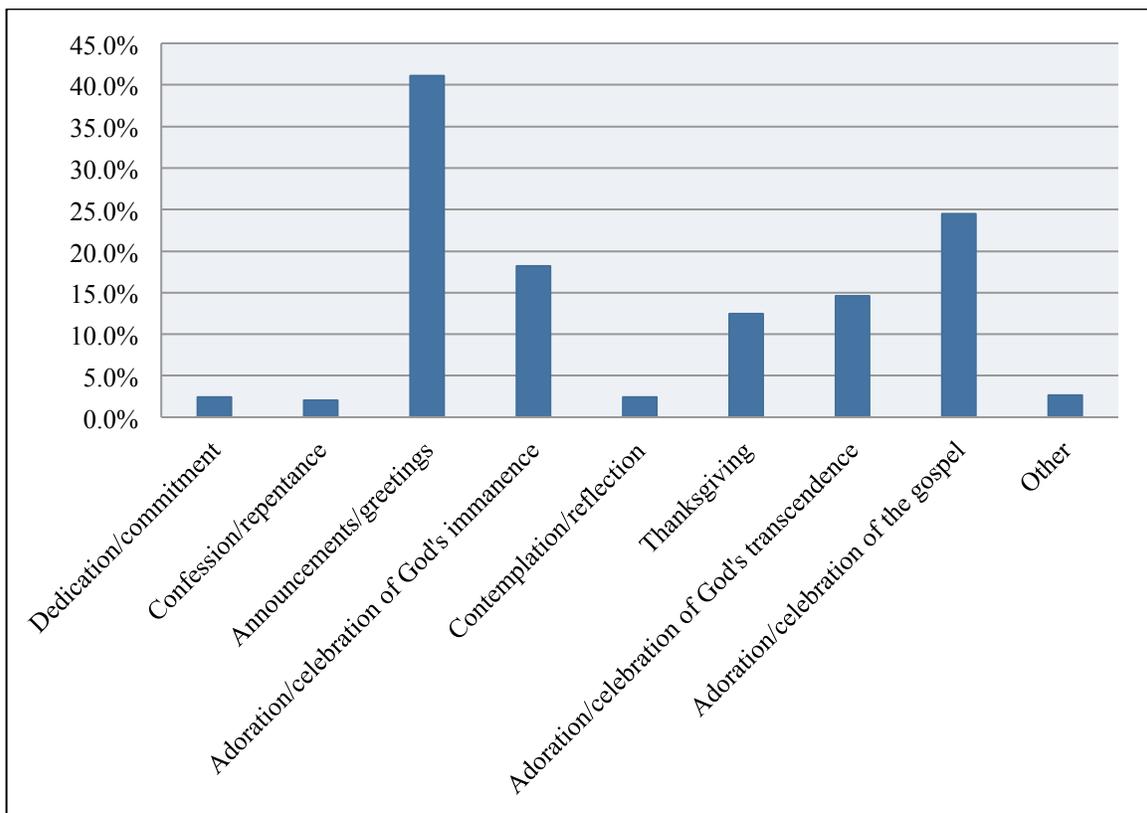


Figure 6. Characteristic focus of elements that *always* occur within the first ten minutes of a worship service (Q18)

²³An analysis of Scripture as a part of worship service beginnings is forthcoming in the presentation and analysis of Q19 and Q20.

Figure 7 displays the combination of the “always” and the “frequently” categories related to the characteristic focus of elements that occur in the first ten minutes of worship services. The elements comprising the top five categories are essentially the same for those reported in figure 6 above and those reported in figure 7 below; however, the ranking is slightly different. In figure 7, the adoration/celebration of Christ, the cross, and the gospel moves up to the number one characteristic focus of elements that frequently or always occur in 85.1% of worship service beginnings. Moving to second position, the adoration/celebration of God’s love and care for his creation (immanence) frequently or always characterize service beginnings in 76.4% of the churches sampled.

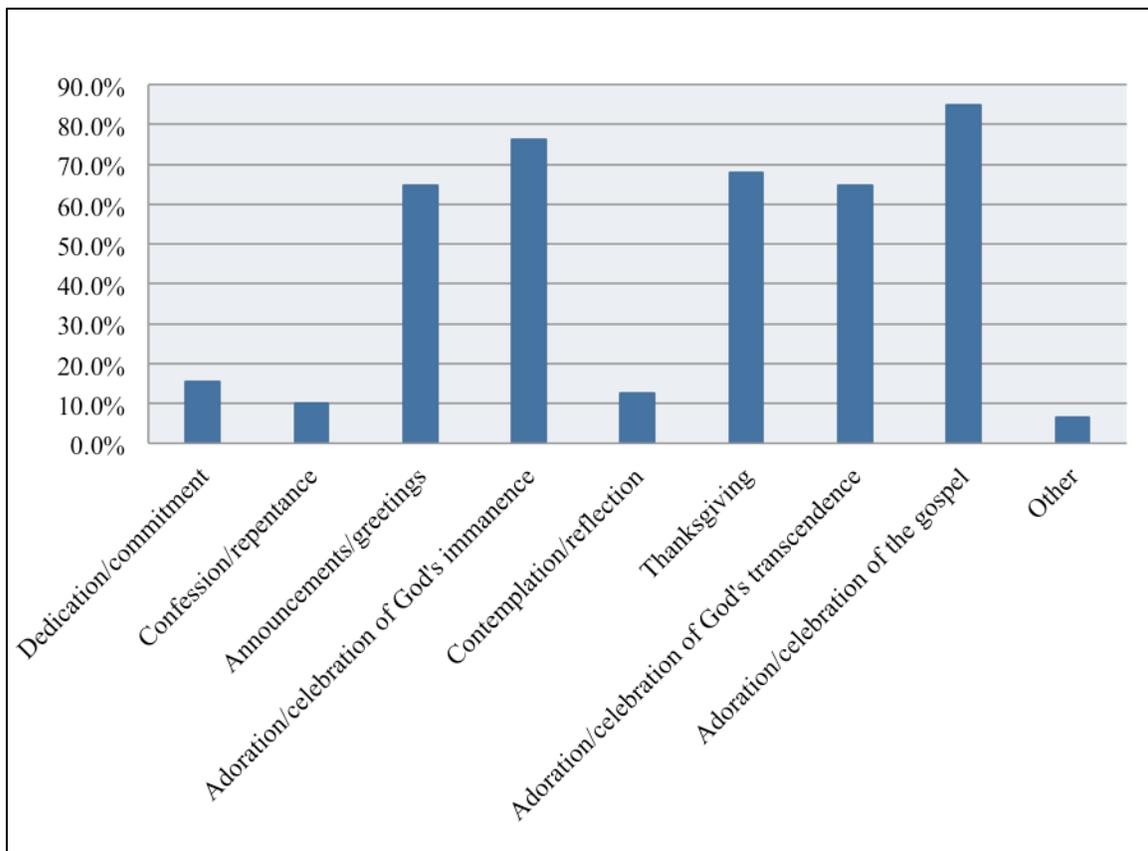


Figure 7. Characteristic focus of elements that *always* and *frequently* (combined) occur within the first ten minutes of a worship service (Q18)

Figure 7 also demonstrates relatively high frequency percentages for five of the eight categories queried in Q18: announcements/greetings (64.7 %), adoration/celebration of God's immanence (76.4%), thanksgiving (68.1%), adoration/celebration of God's transcendence (64.6%), and adoration/celebration of the gospel (85.1%). Because five categories are highly indicated (instead of one or two), the best analysis that can be extrapolated from this particular data is that elements typically chosen to be included in worship service beginnings are not restricted to a single characteristic but rather are varied.

Presentation of Q19 and response bank. Q19 was designed to discover whether Scripture reading is a part of worship service beginnings. The question was stated as follows:

Q19. When is Scripture typically read during the portion of the worship service that precedes the message? Check all that apply.

Worship pastors were asked to select one or more of the following time periods where Scripture reading occurs in their worship services:

1. Near or at the beginning (e.g., within the first 10 minutes)
2. The middle (e.g., minutes 11-20)
3. Near the end (e.g., minutes 21-30)
4. Scripture is typically only read during the message
5. Other

Table 6 indicates the responses by worship pastors concerning the time period in which Scripture reading may occur in their worship services. Worship pastors could select multiple responses to Q19. The total number of worship pastors responding to Q19

was n=260. Calculations are based on the total number of worship pastor responding to the question (n=260) rather than the total number of responses to Q19.

Table 6. Chronological placement of Scripture reading within a worship service (Q19)

<i>Chronological Placement of Scripture Reading</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Near or at the beginning (e.g., within the first 10 minutes)	97	37.3
The middle (e.g., minutes 11-20)	131	50.4
Near the end (e.g., minutes 21-30)	56	21.5
Scripture is typically only read during the message	78	30.0
Other	25	9.6
Count n=	260	

(The response percentage is calculated as a function of total respondents for Q19, n=260)

Analysis of the responses to Q19. The data reported in table 6 indicate that almost one-third (30%) of the worship pastors surveyed do not include Scripture reading as a part of the congregational worship time preceding the message. Of the 70% that do, slightly over one-third of the worship pastors sampled (37.3%) include Scripture reading as a part of their service *beginnings*. This implies that over 62% of worship pastors do not include Scripture reading as a part of their worship service beginnings.²⁴ Figure 8 offers a visual representation of Scripture’s place in worship services:

²⁴Worship pastors could indicated multiple placements where Scripture reading commonly occurs in their worship services, hence the combined percentages totaling above 100%.

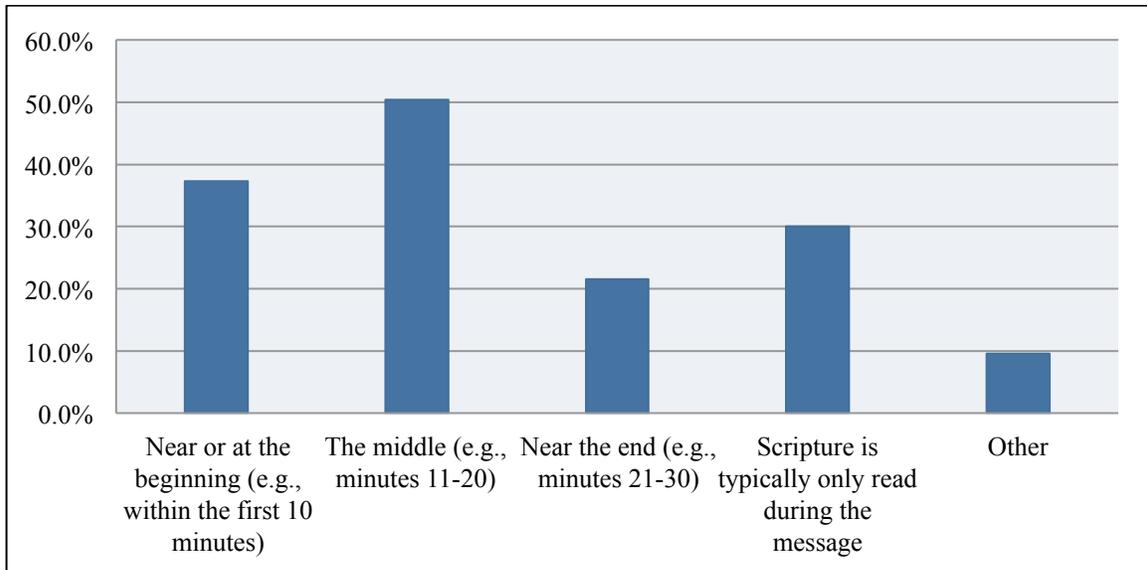


Figure 8. Chronological placement of Scripture reading (Q19)

Presentation of Q20 and response bank. Worship pastors were asked to respond to this request:

Q20. If Scripture is read at or near the beginning of your worship service (within the first 10 minutes), please check the kind of passage that most often describes the flavor/theme/focus of that Scripture:

Worship pastors were asked to select from the following six thematic categories of Scripture. Categories were randomized to minimize sequence-related response bias.

1. Scripture that points toward God’s nearness and/or his care and provision for his creation: for example, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet 5:7) or “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb 13:5b) or “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28).
2. Scripture of adoration and praise: for example, “Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!” (Ps 98:1) or “Praise the Lord! Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!” (Ps 106:1) or “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs” (Ps 100:1).
3. Scripture that focuses on Christ and his gospel: for example, “Therefore, having been justified out of faith, we have peace toward God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1) or “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:8) or “God made him

who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

4. Scripture that conveys God’s distinction and separateness from his creation: for example, “. . . I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst” (Hos 11:9b) or “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth. . . . He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in” (Isa 40:22) or “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!” (Job 38:4-5b).
5. No generalizations can be made about the kind of Scripture passages we commonly choose to read at or near the beginning of a worship service.
6. We do not typically include Scripture reading at or near the beginning of a worship service.

Table 7 indicates the responses by worship pastors characterizing the kind of passage that most often describes the flavor, theme, or focus of the Scripture they select as a part of their worship service beginnings.²⁵

Table 7. Scriptural themes or focal points used for service beginnings (Q20)

<i>Scriptural Themes or Focal Points</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Scripture that points to God’s nearness (immanence)	6	3.5
Scripture of adoration and praise	81	47.1
Scripture that focuses on Christ and his gospel	15	8.7
Scripture that conveys God’s distinction (transcendence)	10	5.8
No generalizations can be made	60	34.9
Count n=	172	

²⁵Table 7 does not include an additional 41 responses to the answer choice, “We do not typically include Scripture reading at or near the beginning of a worship service.”

Analysis of responses to Q20. For those worship pastors who utilize Scripture reading as a part of their worship service beginnings, Q20 was crafted to discover whether a particular theme or focus characterized the Scripture passages typically employed in the service beginnings. As indicated in figure 9, passages of Scripture that convey God’s immanence, God’s transcendence, or Christ and his gospel are rarely employed in the opening segments of worship. Instead, for those churches in which a generalization can be made, 47.1% of the worship pastors chose Scripture that could be characterized as adoration and praise. This selection seems to indicate that worship pastors are more predisposed in service beginnings to encourage their congregations in their role of praising God rather than to tell their congregations something praiseworthy about God, God’s character, or God’s work.

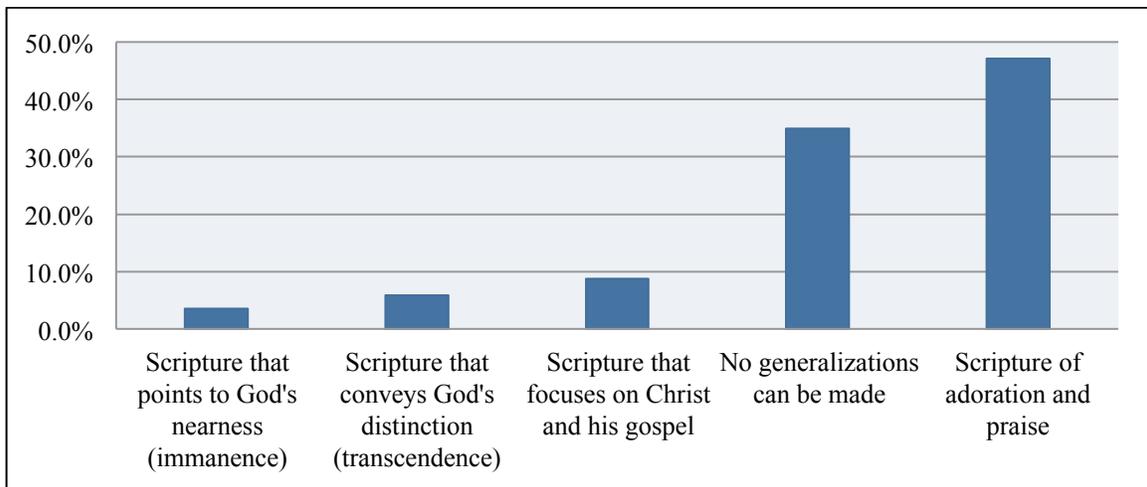


Figure 9. Themes or focal points that characterize Scripture reading employed as a part of worship service beginnings (Q20)

Slightly more than one-third of the worship pastors surveyed who use Scripture in their worship beginnings do not indicate a predictable or recurring theme or

focus for that Scripture. I would postulate that this could be due to the strong value identified in Q18 of complimenting the pastor's message or series theme, which would then predispose a worship pastor to select elements of worship, including opening Scripture passages, that are complimentary to that theme.

Analysis related to RQ3 and RQ4. RQ3 asks the following: "Do worship service beginnings show evidence of being influenced by a goal, value, or objective held by the worship pastor that purposes to represent God in his transcendent otherness?" I would conclude from the data that the answer is no. Representing God in his transcendent otherness as a foundational or initial beginning point for a worship service is not a strongly influential goal, value, or objective for many worship pastors as they construct the beginning moments of their worship services. When asked to characterize the focus of the elements that most often occur as a part of worship service beginnings, transcendence ranks fifth (see figure 7). In the group of five elements that worship pastors commonly chose to include in their service beginnings, transcendence ranks last (gospel, immanence, thanksgiving, announcements, transcendence).

The absence of grounding the worship service in God's transcendence is also indicated in the response patterns to Q19 and Q20. Scripture is only typically used as a part of worship beginnings by only 37.3% of worship pastors. Of those 37.3% who do use Scripture as a part of their service beginnings, only 5.8% use Scripture that would convey God's distinction or transcendence.

RQ4 asks the following: "If the worship service beginnings do not represent God in his transcendent otherness, how do worship pastors most often initially represent God?" I would conclude that the data points to representing God in his immanent

nearness. As stated earlier in the analysis of Q18, the characteristic focus of worship beginnings is more dynamically varied rather than singularly focused. Figure 7 shows five distinct characterizations of elements that often comprise worship service beginnings: adoration/celebration of the gospel, adoration/celebration of God's immanence, thanksgiving, announcements/greetings, and adoration/celebration of God's transcendence. However, the characteristic focus of the elements that most often occur as a part of service beginnings are the celebration/adoration of Christ/cross/gospel and the adoration/celebration of God's immanence. Not surprisingly, Southern Baptists are noted for a praiseworthy spirit of evangelicalism and a deep passion to tell others of God's great love and Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross for the sins of mankind. Both of these expressions—God's love and Christ's sacrifice—can be characterized as immanent expressions of God to and for his people. The great danger of the passionate declaration of God's immanent love and sacrifice without the proper interpretive framework is that both can be diminished in size, scope, and value when not properly contextualized by God's transcendence. The responses to Q18 indicate that what God does for his people—he loves, he cares, and he sacrificially dies—is more present in worship service beginnings than who God is—his distinction, separateness, “wholly otherness,” holiness, glory, independence, et al.

In addition, scriptural beginnings (within the first ten minutes of a service) are absent in over 62% of the churches sampled (see Q19). If used, the Scripture worship pastors most often selected to begin a worship service is categorized as that of adoration and praise selected from Psalms. A third of the worship pastors sampled reported that no generalizations can be made about Scriptural themes or focus used to begin a service.

The high number of worship pastors reporting no common practice of Scripture reading during the first ten minutes of a worship service (62.7%)²⁶ and the low occurrence of Scripture reading that points toward God's transcendence (5.8%)²⁷ may be indicative of an overall worship design paradigm that is not governed by the principle of revelation-response or the rhythm of transcendence then immanence. Both of these paradigms will be discussed at a later point in this dissertation.

Sequential Ordering of Worship Service Elements (WDP Part 7)

Part 7 of the WDP was designed to discern the underlying goals and value systems that influence the way worship pastors sequentially order services of worship.²⁸

Presentation of Q22 and response bank. Worship pastors were asked to respond to the following three-part request:

The drop down list below displays factors that may influence how you ORDER or SEQUENCE elements in your worship service. Please indicate the top three most influential factors that impact how you ORDER or SEQUENCE a worship service.

Using the ranking system of *most influential factor* – *2nd most influential factor* – *3rd most influential factor*, worship pastors evaluated the following response bank of potential influencers on how a worship service is sequentially ordered.

1. Tempo (of a song)
2. Style (of a song)

²⁶This percentage is extrapolated from table 6 (Q19).

²⁷See table 7 (Q20).

²⁸Q21 will be presented later in the chapter.

3. Key (or key relationships)
4. Traditions of your church
5. The concept of revelation-response
6. Historic or neo-liturgical formats (e.g., Adoration – Confession – Thanksgiving – Petition)
7. A movement from fast/celebrative to slower/contemplative
8. A movement from slower/contemplative to fast/celebrative
9. A movement from conveying God's immanence to God's transcendence
10. A movement from conveying God's transcendence to God's immanence
11. None
12. Other

Table 8 indicates the responses by worship pastors characterizing the top three influences on how their worship services are sequenced.

Table 8. Ranked factors most influencing sequential order of worship elements (Q22)

<i>Influencing Factors</i>	<i>Most Influential</i>		<i>2nd Most Influential</i>		<i>3rd Most Influential</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Tempo	31	11.8	40	15.7	13	5.2
Style	15	5.7	40	15.7	42	16.9
Key or key relationships	3	1.1	36	14.2	56	22.5
Traditions of your church	14	5.3	13	5.1	14	5.6
Revelation-response	31	11.8	29	11.4	25	10.0
Historic or neo-liturgical formats	14	5.3	7	2.8	12	4.8
Fast to slow	108	41.2	52	20.5	22	8.8
Slower to fast	1	0.4	5	2.0	7	2.8

Table 8—Continued. Ranked factors most influencing sequential order of worship elements (Q22)

<i>Influencing Factors</i>	<i>Most Influential</i>		<i>2nd Most Influential</i>		<i>3rd Most Influential</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Immanence to transcendence	11	4.2	9	3.5	9	3.6
Transcendence to immanence	8	3.1	9	3.5	15	6.0
None	6	2.3	7	2.8	20	8.0
Other	20	7.6	7	2.8	14	5.6
Count n=	262		254		249	

(The first number in each category represents the number of responses. The second number represents the response percentage calculated as a function of total respondents, “count.”)

Analysis of responses to Q22. Q22 was designed to discern what factors most influence the way worship pastors order or sequence elements in their worship services. Unlike Q17, which sought to discover what factors most influence how elements of worship are *selected* for inclusion in a worship service, Q22 sought to discover factors that influence *sequential ordering* of those elements once selected.

The response bank included influencers that can be divided into three basic categories: (1) musical elements (tempo, style, key or key relationships, fast to slow, slower to fast), (2) theological considerations (immanence to transcendence, transcendence to immanence, revelation-response, neo-liturgical formats), and (3) established traditions of the church. By far in all three ranking categories (most, 2nd most, and 3rd most influential), musical factors surpassed theological considerations regarding how worship services are sequentially structured. Figures 10, 11, and 12 demonstrate the high level of influence that these musical considerations play (musical

considerations appear striped, theological considerations appear solid, and church traditions appear checkered).

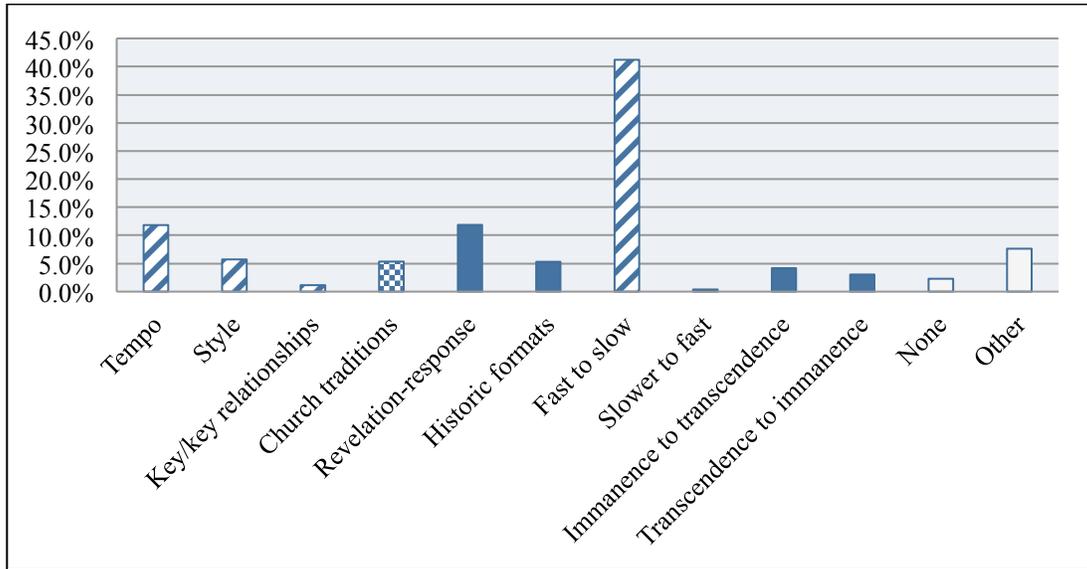


Figure 10. *Most influential* factor to sequential ordering of worship elements (Q22)

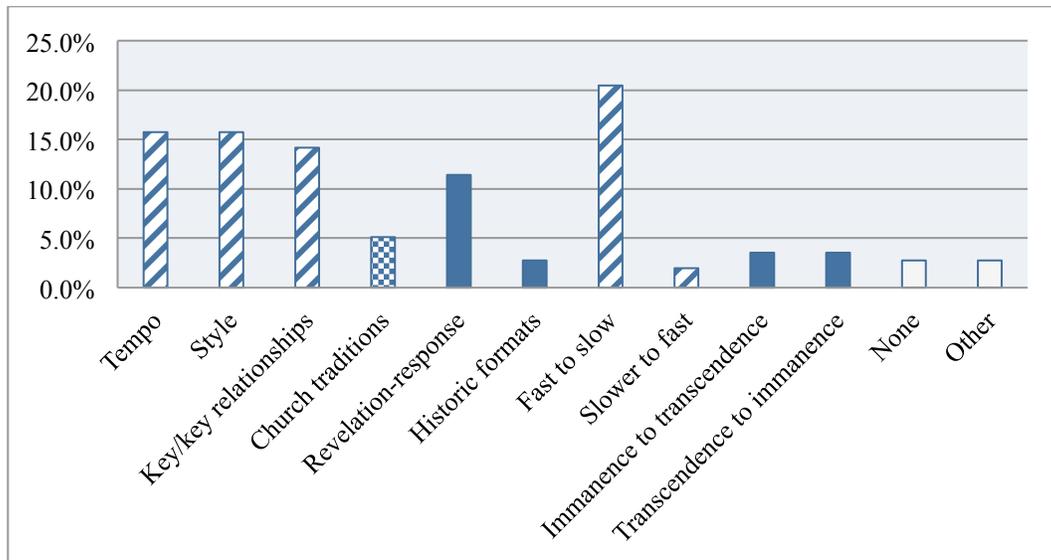


Figure 11. *2nd most influential* factor to sequential ordering of worship elements (Q22)

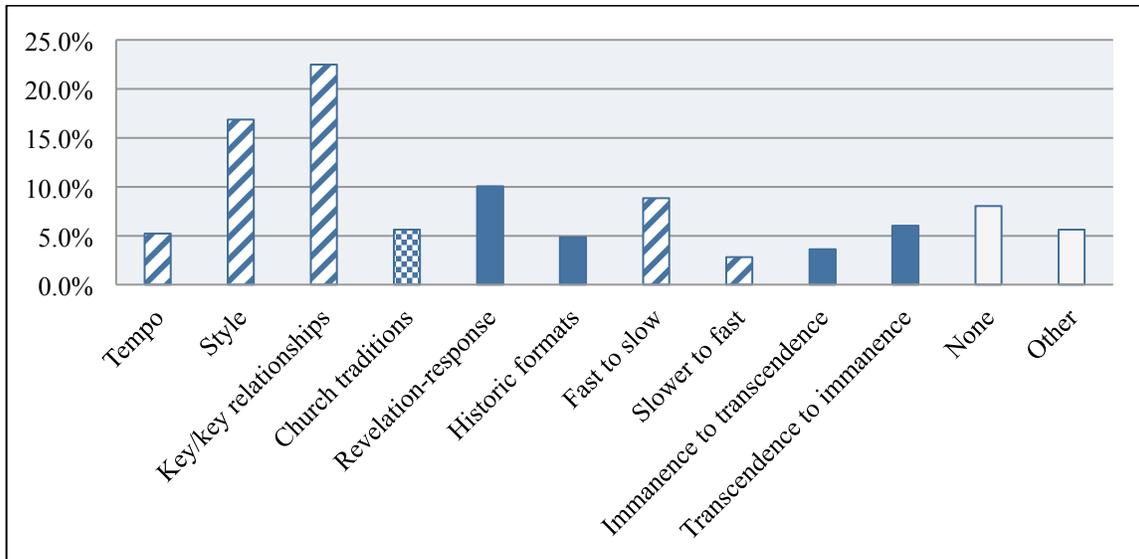


Figure 12. *3rd most influential* factor to sequential ordering of worship elements (Q22)

Sequenced from lowest to highest, figure 13 conceptualizes the composite rankings of the *most*, *2nd most*, and *3rd most influential* factors. Composite scores were calculated as a function of the average number of total respondents, n=255. Considering the data in the aggregate, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, musical considerations exert the strongest influence on how a majority of worship pastors shape the order and sequence of their worship services. Second, the service contour that can be described as a movement from fast/celebrative to slower/contemplative is the most significant influencer with a composite ranking of 71.4%. Third, musical style (38.0%), key or key relationships (37.3%), and tempo (32.9%) are notable influencers on how worship pastors order and sequence elements to be included in their worship services. Fourth, only one non-musical factor, the concept of revelation-response, presents in the top five influencers. With a composite score of 33.3%, the influence of the concept of revelation-response is nearly half that of the influence of the musical consideration of

moving from fast/celebrative to slower/contemplative (71.4%). Finally, most theological considerations and church traditions are of little consequence to a worship pastors' sequential order of liturgical elements.

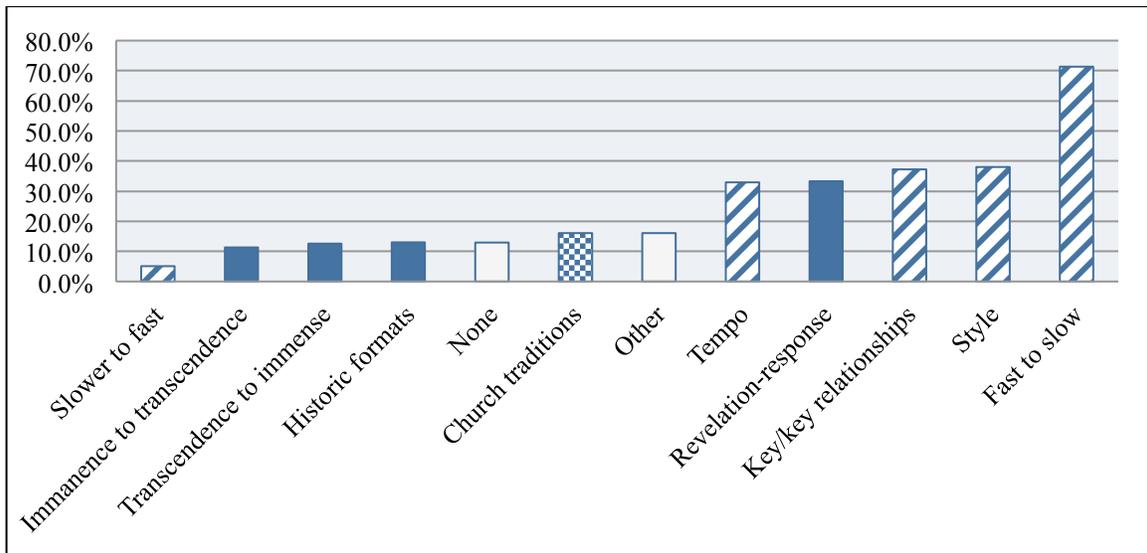


Figure 13. Composite ranking of influencers on sequential ordering ranked from lowest influence to highest influence (Q22)

Presentation of Q24 and response bank.²⁹ Worship pastors were asked to

respond to the following eight-part request:

Please complete the following thought:

- The content of the FIRST congregational song is most often like
- The content of the SECOND congregational song is most often like
- The content of the THIRD congregational song is most often like
- The content of the FOURTH congregational song is most often like
- The content of the FIFTH congregational song is most often like
- The content of the SIXTH congregational song is most often like
- The content of the SEVENTH congregational song is most often like
- The content of the EIGHTH congregational song is most often like

²⁹Results for Q23 will be considered as a part of Q24.

Worship pastors selected their responses from the following response bank:

1. “This Is Amazing Grace,” “Happy Day,” “All I Have Is Christ,” or “Victory in Jesus” (songs about the redeeming work of Christ)
2. “Whom Shall I Fear,” “Friend of God,” “One Thing Remains,” or “The Love of God” (songs about God’s nearness, love, and care for his children)
3. “Power of the Cross,” “In Christ Alone,” “Glorious Day” or “Hallelujah, What a Savior” (songs depicting the cross/gospel)
4. “Holy, Holy, Holy,” “God of Wonders,” “Behold Our God,” or “Indescribable” (songs that convey God's separateness and distinction from creation)
5. “10,000 Reasons,” “All Creatures of Our God and King,” or “Here I Am To Worship” (songs that express or encourage exaltation)
6. “Lord, I Need You,” “Just As I Am,” “Give Us Clean Hands,” or “Take My Life, and Let It Be” (songs that express repentance/consecration)
7. “Thanks Be to Our God,” “Jesus, Thank You,” or “How Great Is the Love” (songs that express thanksgiving)
8. Other (please specify below)
9. No general characterizations can be made

Table 9 represents the preferences indicated by the worship pastors concerning the kinds of songs and their most common sequential placement in an order of worship.³⁰

Table 9. Sequential placement of songs in a worship service order (Q24)

<i>Song Categories</i>	<i>1st Song</i>	<i>2nd Song</i>	<i>3rd Song</i>	<i>4th Song</i>	<i>5th Song</i>	<i>6th Song</i>	<i>7th Song</i>	<i>8th Song</i>
Songs about the redeeming work of Christ	98 36.8	48 18.0	20 7.5	10 3.8	4 1.5	3 1.1	0 0.0	0 0.0
Songs about God’s nearness, love, and care for his children (immanence)	14 5.3	68 25.6	38 14.3	20 7.5	12 4.5	1 0.4	2 0.8	1 0.4
Songs depicting the cross/gospel	2 0.8	16 6.0	46 17.3	29 10.9	18 6.8	5 1.9	2 0.8	0 0.0

³⁰The percentage calculations in table 9 are based on n=266, the total number of respondents to Q24, rather than the varying number of responses to each song’s ordinal placement.

Table 9—Continued. Sequential placement of songs in a worship service order³¹

<i>Song Categories</i>	<i>1st Song</i>	<i>2nd Song</i>	<i>3rd Song</i>	<i>4th Song</i>	<i>5th Song</i>	<i>6th Song</i>	<i>7th Song</i>	<i>8th Song</i>
Songs that convey God's separateness and distinction from creation (transcendence)	31 11.7	23 8.6	19 7.1	14 5.3	5 1.9	0 0.0	4 1.5	1 0.4
Songs that express or encourage exaltation	46 17.3	33 12.4	47 17.7	22 8.3	12 4.5	5 1.9	1 0.4	1 0.4
Songs that express repentance/consecration	0 0.0	5 1.9	17 6.4	65 24.4	38 14.3	16 6.0	8 3.0	6 2.3
Songs that express thanksgiving	7 2.6	10 3.8	12 4.5	17 6.4	9 3.4	12 4.5	3 1.1	2 0.8
Other	19 7.1	4 1.5	2 0.8	5 1.9	2 0.8	2 0.8	1 0.4	2 0.8
No general characterizations can be made	49 18.4	38 14.3	37 13.9	37 13.9	33 12.4	29 10.9	29 10.9	29 10.9
Count n=	266	(245)	(238)	(219)	(133)	(73)	(50)	(42)

(In each cell, the top number indicates the number of responses. The bottom number indicates the response percentage calculated as a function of the total respondents to Q24, n=266).

Analysis of responses to Q24. Q24 was designed to discover the way(s) that worship pastors most commonly sequence the songs that appear in their worship services. Table 10 indicates a single definitive pattern of service sequence emerging from the data. The service order indicated in table 10 is by no means representative of all or most orders of service. Rather, it represents the only visible pattern that frequently emerges in Southern Baptist churches.

Several observations can be drawn from the data contained in table 9. First, worship pastors tend to begin their sequences of worship with songs about the redeeming

³¹The percentage calculations in table 9 are based on n=266, the total number of respondents to Q24, rather than the varying number of responses to each song's ordinal placement.

Table 10. Most common sequential ordering of a worship service (Q24)

<i>Song's Sequential Position in the Worship Service</i>	<i>Song Category</i>	<i>Song Examples</i>
1st Song	Songs about the redeeming work of Christ	"This Is Amazing Grace," "Happy Day," "All I Have Is Christ," or "Victory in Jesus"
2nd Song	Songs about God's nearness, love, and care for his children (immanence)	"Whom Shall I Fear," "Friend of God," "One Thing Remains," or "The Love of God"
(3rd Song) ³²	Songs that express or encourage exaltation	"10,000 Reasons," "All Creatures of Our God and King," or "Here I Am To Worship"
(3rd Song)	Songs depicting the cross/gospel	"Power of the Cross," "In Christ Alone," "Glorious Day," or "Hallelujah, What a Savior"
4th Song	Songs that express repentance/consecration	"Lord, I Need You," "Just As I Am," "Give Us Clean Hands," or "Take My Life, and Let It Be"
5th Song	Songs that express repentance/consecration	"Lord, I Need You," "Just As I Am," "Give Us Clean Hands," or "Take My Life, and Let It Be"
6th Song	No general characterizations can be made	
7th Song	No general characterizations can be made	
8th Song	No general characterizations can be made	

work of Christ. Second, from the musical perspective of tempo, the sequence represented in table 10 could arguably be described as beginning fast/celebrative and moving to

³²In the "3rd Song" category, "Songs depicting the cross/gospel" was less than a half a percentage point away from the top place holder of "Songs that express or encourage exaltation."

slower/contemplative. Third, potentially reflected in this common sequential order is the impact of the age of individualism on worship service beginnings. The lyrics of the often-celebrative category of “Songs about the redeeming work of Christ” frequently place emphasis on the one who needs redeeming. For example, the pronouns “me,” “my,” and “I” coupled with the expression of man’s great salvific need can be prominent features of this category of song. Finally, because only one definitive service order emerges from the data, I conclude that many services of worship are constructed with songs whose categories have no discernable link or arc. This conclusion would be consistent with freedoms Southern Baptist worship pastors possess to construct worship services in any way they wish.

Analysis related to RQ5 and RQ6. RQ5 asks the following: “Is the sequential ordering of a worship service influenced by a goal, value, or objective held by the worship pastor that would necessitate representing God in his transcendent otherness prior to representing God in his immanent nearness?” The data derived from Q22 do not indicate the influence of a sequencing objective that would necessitate beginning a worship service by conveying God's transcendence and then later conveying God's immanence. In fact, according to the data gleaned from Q22, neither the movement from transcendence to immanence nor the movement from immanence to transcendence has significant influence on sequential ordering of worship services. Figure 14 illustrates the relatively low impact of a service contour that is called for by placing value on a movement from viewing God in his transcendent otherness to viewing God in his immanent nearness.

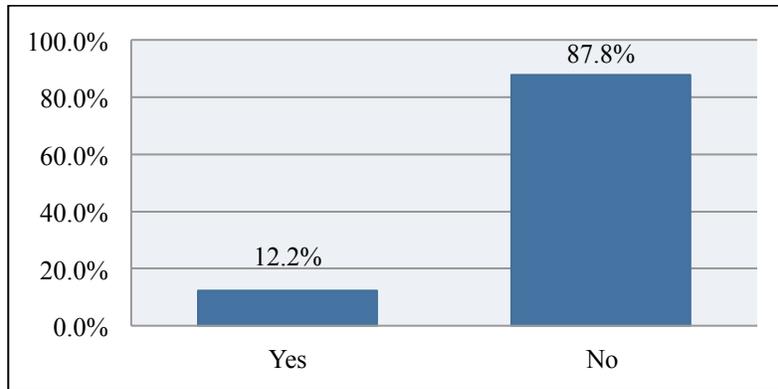


Figure 14. Is a movement from transcendence to immanence indicated as one of the top three factors influencing the sequential ordering of worship services?

In addition, Q24 indicates a substantially low occurrence of songs that represent God in his transcendent otherness at the beginning of a service. Q24 also highlights a very low occurrence of songs about God’s distinction and separateness from his creation (transcendence) at any point in the worship service as demonstrated in table 11.

Table 11. Frequency of occurrence of songs of transcendence as a first song, second song, third song, etc. (Q24)

<i>Sequential Order</i>	<i>Frequency of selection of “Songs that convey God’s separateness and distinction from creation” (%)</i>
1st Song	11.7
2nd Song	8.6
3rd Song	7.1
4th Song	5.3
5th Song	1.9
6th-8th Song	1.9

The category “Songs that convey God’s transcendence” in general was one of the two least selected categories of songs used by worship pastors anywhere in the

sequential order. The song category entitled “Songs that express thanksgiving” was the least selected category.

To further confirm that songs conveying God’s separateness and distinction from his creation (transcendence) are not selected to either begin a worship sequence or appear in the song sequence in any role, the following questions were applied to the data collected in Q24: (1) Did the worship pastor select the transcendent song category at any point in his/her sequence of worship? (2) If selected, where does the worship pastor commonly place a song of transcendence in a service of worship? Figures 15 and 16 show the extrapolated answers to these questions.³³

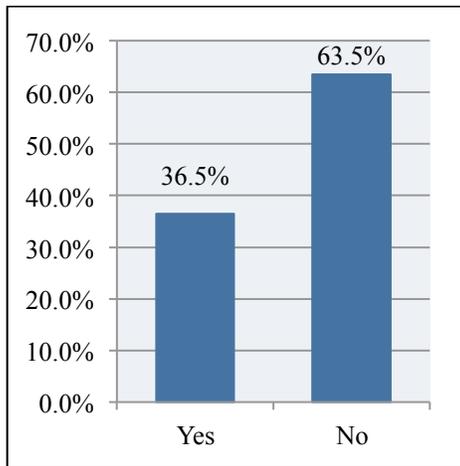


Figure 15. Is a song of transcendence selected at any time for inclusion in worship services?

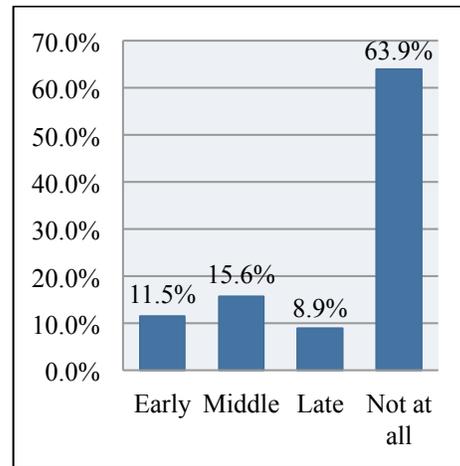


Figure 16. Where do worship pastors commonly place songs of transcendence in a worship sequence?

³³ The calculations in figure 15 are based on n=266. However, the calculations for figure 16 are based on n=269 due to three worship pastors selecting two options for their placement of songs of transcendence. This accounts for the slight difference in percentage of “No” in figure 15 and “Not at all” in figure 16.

RQ6 asks: “If the sequential ordering of a worship service does not reflect the priority of representing God in his transcendent otherness prior to his immanent nearness, what are the goals, values, and objectives that most influence the way a worship pastor sequences the elements of his or her worship service?” As previously stated in the analysis for Q22, sequential ordering of a worship service is most influenced by a tempo contour that moves from fast/celebrative to slower/contemplative in addition to style and key relationships. In examining Q24, a general movement from fast to slow and from more celebrative to more reflective can be discerned, which corroborates the findings of Q22. Beyond these conclusions, I can only definitively assert that the concept of God’s transcendence is not an influence on the majority of service beginnings and does not substantially affect most services at any point during the congregational singing.

Additional Findings

Presentation of Q21. The WDP contained one question that did not attempt to discern an underlying goal, value, or objective that influenced worship planning but rather asked for a direct personal assessment by worship pastors of the kind of portrait of God they are portraying through their worship services. Q21 asks the following three-part question:

As you plan worship, what do you most often convey about God?

As you plan worship, what do you 2nd most often convey about God?

As you plan worship, what do you 3rd most often convey about God?

The response options appeared as a bank of six groups of transcendent attributes, six groups of immanent attributes, and an option to write in an individual response. The response options were as follows:

1. His closeness and intimacy

2. His compassion and forgiveness
3. His faithfulness
4. His grace and mercy
5. His greatness and glory
6. His holiness
7. His kindness and love
8. His omnipotence and eternity
9. His provision and trustworthiness
10. His separateness and distinction
11. His sovereignty and majesty
12. His splendor and grandeur
13. Other

Table 12 represents the self-perception of what worship pastors believe they most often convey about God through their worship services.

Table 12. Worship pastors' self-perception of what they most often convey about God through their worship services (Q21)

<i>Transcendent or Immanent Characteristics of God</i>	<i>Most Often</i>		<i>2nd Most Often</i>		<i>3rd Most Often</i>	
	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
His greatness and glory	113	44.0	34	13.2	15	5.8
His grace and mercy	43	16.7	71	27.6	46	17.9
His sovereignty and majesty	27	10.5	25	9.7	20	7.8
His faithfulness	19	7.4	33	12.8	48	18.7
His holiness	17	6.6	14	5.4	17	6.6

Table 12—Continued. Worship pastors’ self-perception of what they most often convey about God through their worship services (Q21)

<i>Transcendent or Immanent Characteristics of God</i>	<i>Most Often</i>		<i>2nd Most Often</i>		<i>3rd Most Often</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
His kindness and love	10	3.9	16	6.2	25	9.7
His compassion and forgiveness	9	3.5	28	10.9	27	10.5
His provision and trustworthiness	7	2.7	9	3.5	22	8.6
His splendor and grandeur	6	2.3	11	4.3	14	5.4
His closeness and intimacy	3	1.2	8	3.1	17	6.6
His omnipotence and eternity	2	0.8	7	2.7	3	1.2
His separateness and distinction	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.8
Other	1	0.4	1	0.4	1	0.4
Count	257		257		257	

(The first number in each category represents the number of responses. The second number represents the response percentage calculated as a function of the total respondents, “count”).

Analysis of responses to Q21. Q21 was designed to directly ascertain from worship pastors their perception of what they most often convey about God through their worship services. I would contend that most worship pastors want to convey all of God’s attributes over time in their worship planning. In addition, the response bank is necessarily limited and the attributes arbitrarily paired. Also, what pastors think they convey may or may not be congruent with actual practice, a potential topic for future research but outside of the purview of this dissertation. Nevertheless, the data from this question provide noteworthy insight into the perceived portrait of God that worship pastors believe they are painting each Sunday.

Table 13 represents the characteristics of God provided in the response choices to Q21 and is divided into a column of transcendent characteristics and a column of immanent characteristics.

Table 13. God’s transcendent and immanent characteristics (Q21)

<i>Transcendent Characteristics</i>	<i>Immanent Characteristics</i>
His greatness and glory	His grace and mercy
His sovereignty and majesty	His faithfulness
His holiness	His kindness and love
His splendor and grandeur	His compassion and forgiveness
His omnipotence and eternity	His provision and trustworthiness
His separateness and distinction	His closeness and intimacy

Figure 17 represents the worship pastors’ self-perception of what they most often convey about God through their worship services. The data indicate that conveying God’s greatness and glory was selected by 44% of worship pastors as the portrait of God that they most often communicate through their worship planning. God’s grace and mercy and God’s sovereignty and majesty follow at 16.7% and 10.5%, respectively. Figure 17 also demonstrates an interestingly low percentage of conveying God’s holiness (6.6%), a significant focus of Scripture necessarily foundational to a full understanding of the gospel. Also of special note is the nonexistence of the category of separateness and distinction by any worship pastor as the top choice for what he or she most often conveys about God. The data indicate that worship pastors see God’s separateness and distinction neither as an important aspect of God’s greatness and glory nor as an important means of conveying God’s greatness and glory. Worship pastors appear to shy away from the terms “separateness and distinction.”

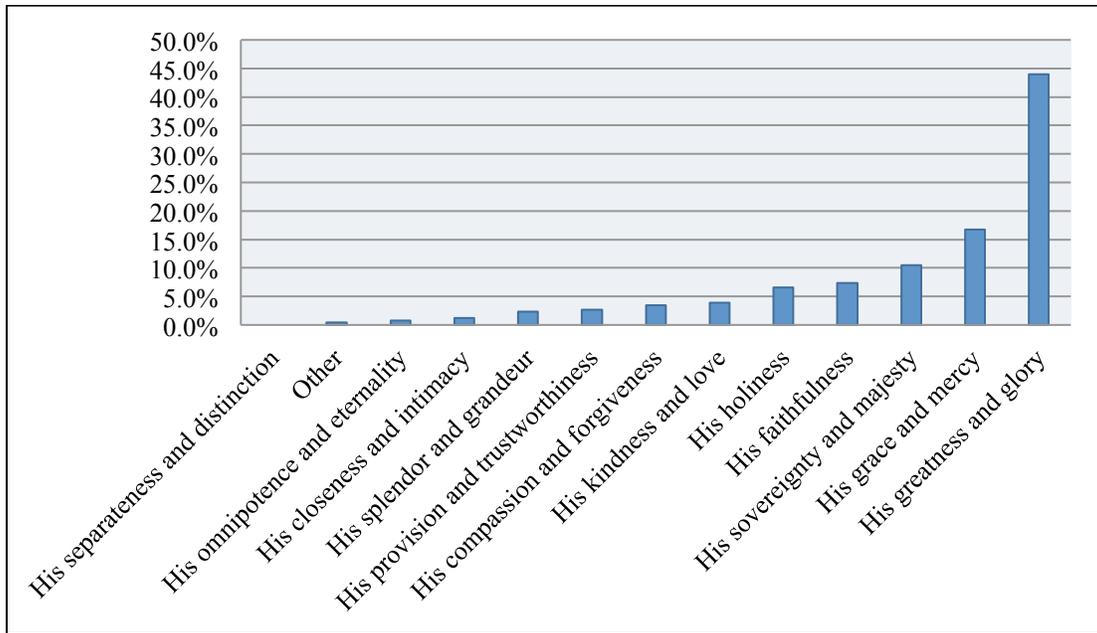


Figure 17. Self-perception of what worship pastors most often convey about God in their worship services (Q21) (ranked lowest to highest)

If indeed, as I have contended, we are in an age of immanence, such a result would be expected. On this question the data support the assertion.³⁴

Illustrated in figure 18, a somewhat different picture emerges when the *most*, *2nd most*, and *3rd most often* data points are considered in the aggregate. Figure 18 shows a virtual tie between God’s grace and mercy (immanence) and God’s greatness and glory (transcendence) with God’s faithfulness following in third place. God’s transcendent qualities of omnipotence, eternity, separateness, and distinction are negligible.

³⁴Many thanks to Cody Libolt for helping me to shape this conclusion.

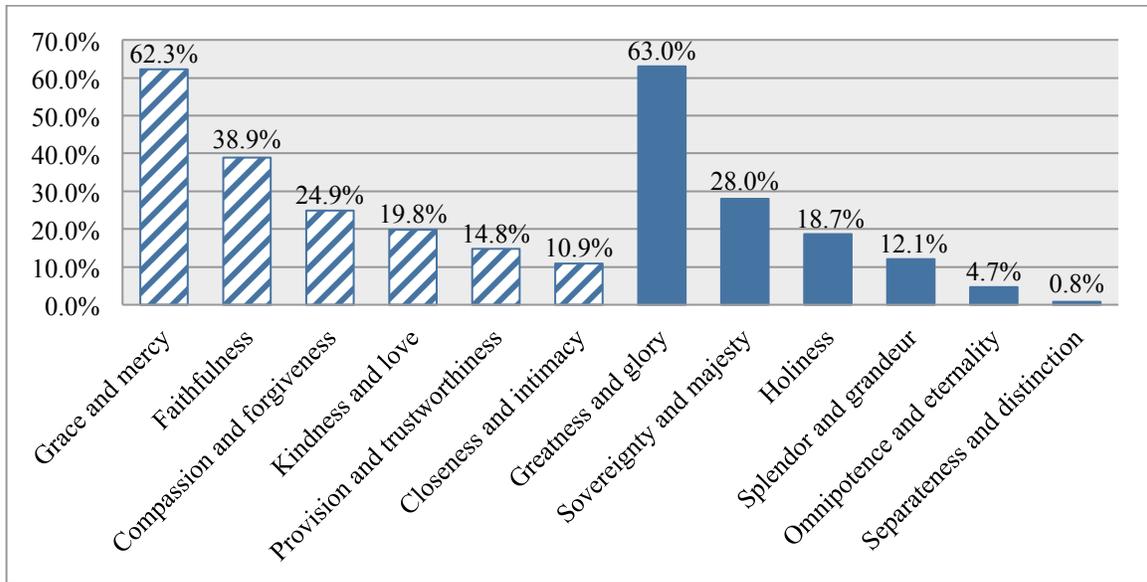


Figure 18. Composite of what worship pastors most often, 2nd most often, and 3rd most often convey about God through their worship services (Q21) (immanent categories appear striped and transcendent categories appear solid)

Adding all composite percentages together for each transcendent category and for each immanent category, conveying God’s immanence receives a total composite score of 171.6 percentage points while conveying God’s transcendence receives a total composite score of 127.3 percentage points. The 44.3-point variance would indicate a stronger propensity for worship pastors to represent God in his immanent nearness rather than his transcendent distinction.

T-scores and I-scores. In order to assess a worship pastor’s overall inclination to convey God in his transcendent otherness or his immanent nearness using more than the one data point provided by Q21, two scores called the Transcendence Score (subsequently called the T-score) and the Immanence Score (subsequently called

the I-score) were created based on the answers given to very specific questions contained within the WDP.³⁵

The T-score is derived from a compilation of responses in the WDP identified by the expert panel, which indicate a sense of God's separateness from his creation, distinction in being, holiness, independence, freedom, and other transcendent characteristics. As such, this score calculates a value based on seventeen factors that indicate a worship pastor's propensity to plan and sequence worship services based on the priority of viewing God in his transcendent otherness. The T-score reflects an average of the total survey population.

The I-score is derived from a compilation of responses in the WDP identified by the expert panel, which indicate a sense of God's nearness, love, and care for his children. As such this score calculates a value based on seventeen factors that indicate a worship pastor's propensity to plan and sequence worship services based on the priority of viewing God in his immanent nearness. The I-score reflects an average of the total survey population.

³⁵The Transcendence/Immanence Score (T-score and I-score) was developed to analyze the differences between these two variables. Specific questions in the WDP were identified as those that could yield either transcendentally or immanently leaning responses and were weighted accordingly. Responses to the specified questions were then used to create a T-score and an I-score for each worship pastor. Responses requiring a specific ranking (e.g., 1st, 2nd, 3rd or very strong, strong, moderate) received 5, 4, or 3 points respectively. These responses included Q16 very strong influence, Q16 strong influence, Q16 moderate influence, Q17 most influential, Q17 2nd most influential, Q17 3rd most influential, Q18 always, Q18 frequently, Q18 sometimes, Q21 most often, Q21 2nd most often, Q21 3rd most often, Q22 most influential factor, Q22 2nd most influential factor, and Q22 3rd most influential factor. Responses only requiring a categorical choice with no ranking received 1 point. These included responses to Q20, Q24 first song, Q24 second song, and Q24 third song. The total possible points that a worship pastor could receive was a T-score or an I-score of 50. Analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics relying on comparisons between these two groups. Descriptive statistics aims to summarize results from a sample population. Bivariate analysis was used to compare the transcendence and immanence scores between churches. Averages and percentages were employed to highlight the difference between these two groups. Many thanks to Steve McCord, statistical analyst for global research at the International Mission Board, for his assistance in creating the transcendence/immanence scale.

When viewed in the aggregate, on average worship pastors received an I-score of 15.77 compared to a T-score of 12.85 indicating the propensity of worship pastors in general to be more immanence focused than transcendence focused. Subtracting the I-score from the T-score yields a differential index, which then indicates a measure of immanence or transcendence leanings.

Of special note, table 14 shows the resulting differential indicating that worship pastors in urban churches tend to be more immanently influenced than those in rural or suburban churches. Table 15 highlights a resulting differential indicating that churches whose average attendance at their main worship service is between 1,000-1,500 tend to be more immanently focused than those whose average worship attendance at their main service is smaller or larger.

Table 14. T-score and I-score differential in relationship to church location

<i>Church Location</i>	<i>T-score</i>	<i>I-score</i>	<i>Differential</i>
Rural	13.4	16.2	-2.8
Suburban	12.8	15.6	-2.8
Urban	12.6	16.2	-3.6

Table 15. T-score and I-score differential in relationship to a church's average attendance at its main worship service (most attended) held on its main campus

<i>Main Worship Service Attendance</i>	<i>T-score</i>	<i>I-score</i>	<i>Differential</i>
0 - 500	12.3	15.6	-3.3
500 - 1,000	13.1	15.3	-2.2
1,000 - 1,500	12.1	16.1	-4.0
1,500 - 2,000	13.2	16.7	-3.5
Over 2000	13.7	15.7	-2.0

Table 16 advances the idea that worship pastors who have served from six to ten years in their current church tend to be more immanently focused while worship pastors in all other tenure brackets tend to be less so.³⁶ It is interesting to note that no calculation produced a differential score weighted toward transcendence.

Table 16. T-score and I-score differential in relationship to worship pastor’s tenure at his or her current church

<i>Longevity (Years)</i>	<i>T-score</i>	<i>I-score</i>	<i>Differential</i>
0 - 5	12.8	16.1	-3.3
6 - 10	12.3	16.2	-4.0
11 - 15	13.3	14.9	-1.6
16 - 20	13.9	15.4	-1.5
21 - 25	13.0	15.0	-2.0

Miscellaneous conclusions derived from the WDP. The following generalizations can be discerned from the WDP that are not directly related to the research questions or the central thesis of this dissertation. Graphs and tables containing the supporting data for these conclusions can be found in appendix 1. The following conclusions can only be generalized to Southern Baptist churches whose weekly average attendance is greater than 1,100.

My research indicates that most Southern Baptist churches in the sample population group:

1. Meet on a single site (61.3%) rather than on multiple sites or more than one campus

³⁶The differential of a -4.0 (instead of a -3.9) in the 6-10 year category resulted from raw scores being rounded to a single decimal point.

2. Conduct two or three worship services on their main campus each weekend (63.3%)
3. Would consider “suburban” as the best term to describe the location of the church’s main campus (70.9%)
4. Are attended by 500-1,500 (68.2%) in their main worship service (most populated) on their main campus

In addition, my research indicates that the main (most attended) worship services of the sampled population are most often:

1. Planned by the worship pastor (97.4%) in conjunction with the senior pastor (65.9%)
2. Between 70-75 minutes in total length (52.6%)
3. Between 25-30 minutes in length for the corporate worship portion of the service that precedes the sermon (57.3%)
4. Described as blended (55.8%), contemporary (63.8%), and multi-generational (67.9%)
5. Comprised of congregational singing (96.3%), a welcome or greeting (88.4%), prayer (88.0%), greeting one another during the service (80.1%), video or media elements (78.7%), baptisms (69.3%), announcements (68.5%), receiving of the offering (67.0%), prayer for the offering (59.9%), and Scripture reading (54.7%)³⁷
6. Comprised of four or five congregational songs (66.5%)
7. Led by a worship leader who is not playing an instrument (61.7%), a band/rhythm section (85.0%), a praise team of one to six singers (83.1%), and a choir who sings anthems occasionally or regularly (61.3%)
8. Observing the Lord’s Supper quarterly (68.2%)
9. Led by worship pastors who have been serving their current church from one to ten years (65.4%; average longevity = 9 years; median longevity = 8 years)

³⁷These elements were listed as those that are typically included in the corporate worship portion of the service that precedes the message.

Evaluation of Research Design

The purpose of this study was to discover the goals, values and objectives that influence how worship leaders in Southern Baptist churches in the United States design their worship services. The survey instrument focused on three distinct facets of worship service planning: (1) the selection of worship service elements to be included in worship services, (2) the sequential ordering of the elements contained in worship services, and (3) the beginnings of worship services. This research was conducted using an Internet-based closed-ended questionnaire distributed to worship pastors of Southern Baptist churches whose average weekly worship attendance is greater than 1,100 (the top attended 547 churches in the United States). The methodology employed in this research accomplished the research purposes and provided substantive answers to the research questions. The strengths and weaknesses of the research design are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Research Strengths

Worship pastor participation. The research design was dependent on the willing participation of worship pastors in Southern Baptist churches across the United States. Of the 547 worship pastors invited to participate, 48.8% successfully completed the WDP survey instrument. This high participation rate demonstrated that (1) surveys of this kind do not often come across the desks of Southern Baptist worship pastors and (2) worship pastors are interested in being involved in the conversation about worship service planning and design.

In addition, the worship pastors completing the survey represent churches from twenty-seven states literally from coast to coast. Therefore, the data gleaned from the

WDP have a degree of geographic diversity giving its results and conclusions a broad base of application.

Research instrument. A strength of this study's research design was the development of the Worship Design Project 2014 research instrument. Through multiple layers of field testing and modifications, the instrument proved to be a valid and reliable means by which to discover the goals, values, and objectives that influence worship pastors as they plan and sequence services of worship. Questions appear to have communicated clearly and response choices appear to have been adequate and relevant. Using Likert-style rating scales and ranking systems provided a reasonable means by which worship pastors could evaluate their own design practices and assess the underlying goals, values, and objectives that guide their liturgical choices.

Survey distribution and administration. The survey distribution list was created through data provided by LifeWay Christian Resources. Then, the WDP was distributed through SurveyMonkey, a reputable web-based company, which was the sole repository of the survey data. In addition to the safe collection of all data entered, SurveyMonkey provided the following tracking information: control number assigned to each respondent, date and time that the survey was first accessed, date and time that the survey was last accessed, and total amount of time taken to complete the survey. A worship pastor's access to the survey was by invitation only and then governed by the following two qualifying questions: (1) Are you the person who most influences worship service planning, ordering and design (other than your senior pastor)? and (2) Please confirm that your church is a Southern Baptist or SBC affiliated church. SurveyMonkey

provided the researcher immediate and real time access to the names of the people successfully completing the survey, the names of people disqualified for not meeting access criteria, and the names of people whose survey responses were incomplete. Only responses from complete survey questionnaires from qualified worship pastors were considered as viable data for analysis.

Research Weaknesses

No known comparative instruments. At the time of the construction of the WDP, no known research instruments existed to provide a point of comparison or a point of departure. Likewise, because this was the inaugural launching of the WDP, it had no prior track record other than field and beta testing for internal comparison.

Survey length. The survey itself was quite lengthy and consisted of twenty-nine questions, many of which included multiple segments. In total, the WDP requested a minimum of sixty-eight data points from each worship pastor. Many respondents required over twenty minutes for completion of the survey exceeding my target goal of ten to fifteen minutes. Many interesting questions appearing in Parts 2, 3, and 4 of the survey were not directly related to the research questions and, therefore, could have been eliminated.

Survey content. The following two additional data points could have provided a significant point of comparison of T-scores and I-scores among worship pastors: (1) the level of undergraduate, graduate, or post-graduate work of the worship pastor and (2) the kind of undergraduate, graduate, or post-graduate work of the worship pastor. In addition, the data collected in Q18 would have spoken more definitively had it

been followed up by a question asking for the top three things that most often appear in the first ten minutes of a worship service.

Survey focus. This survey narrowly focused on songs and Scripture as the two primary elements of a worship service whose content communicates a certain portrait of God through both their inclusion in worship and their sequential ordering in worship. The survey does not specifically address other ways in which God's attributes can be communicated. For example, verbal introductions, verbal transitions, testimonies, and multi-media elements could also be used to paint a biblical portrait of God.

Summary of Research Conclusions and Implications

After a careful assessment of the data, the following conclusions and implications can be drawn from the WDP applying to Southern Baptist churches whose average weekly worship attendance is greater than 1,100.³⁸

1. The goal, value, or objective of conveying God in his transcendent otherness is not strongly influential in the practices of most worship pastors as they plan worship services and select worship elements to be included in worship services.
2. Celebrating the gospel, supporting the sermon or series theme, engaging the heart, and a song's style, key, or tempo are the most influential factors governing the selection of songs or other elements to be included in worship services.
3. Worship service beginnings in most Southern Baptist churches launch with a combination of announcements, a celebration/adoration of Christ, the cross, and the gospel, and the adoration/celebration of God's love and care for his creation. However, thanksgiving and the adoration/celebration of God's distinction and separateness from his people could also be present, but to a lesser degree.

³⁸Suggestions for further research will appear in chap. 9.

4. Most Southern Baptist services of worship do not incorporate dedication, commitment, contemplation, reflection, confession, or repentance as part of their worship service beginnings.
5. Most Southern Baptist churches do not typically read Scripture as part of their service beginnings. However, when Scripture is read at or near the beginning of a worship service, it is usually not Scripture that conveys God's transcendent distinction and separateness from his creation. Rather, Scripture that is used as a part of service beginnings is most commonly Scripture of adoration and praise such as that which is commonly found in Psalms.
6. Other than during the sermon, the most common time for Scripture to be read in Southern Baptist churches is in the middle of the corporate worship time prior to the message, somewhere between minutes 11-20 of the service. Almost one-third of Southern Baptist churches do not include any Scripture reading during the corporate worship time prior to the sermon.
7. Based on a total of seventeen different indicators used in the WDP to formulate an I-score and a T-score, Southern Baptist worship pastors generally are more immanently focused than transcendentally focused.
8. The goal, value, or objective of conveying God in his transcendent otherness first and then in his immanent nearness second is not strongly influential in the practices of how most worship pastors construct the sequential ordering of their worship services.
9. The pattern or sequencing of worship services in Southern Baptist churches is most often governed by musical considerations rather than theological considerations. A movement from fast/celebrative to slower/contemplative exerts the strongest shaping influence on the sequence of a Southern Baptist worship service. Other strong influencers on sequential ordering are the stylistic considerations of a song, the key of a song, or key relationships between songs.
10. In a little more than one-third of Southern Baptist churches, the biblical concept of "revelation-response" is deployed to provide a guide for how worship services are sequentially ordered. Almost two-thirds do not use the biblical concept of "revelation-response" to guide how worship services are sequentially ordered.
11. Worship pastors in Southern Baptist churches are strongly influenced by their desire to celebrate the gospel. Yet, the gospel story they present often has an important piece, indeed a foundational piece, missing: "God is holy." The holiness of God is frequently the missing transcendent component from their songs and Scripture reading.
12. Worship services in Southern Baptist churches do not typically begin with songs that convey God's separateness and distinction from his creation (transcendence).

Likewise, songs that convey God's separateness and distinction from his creation and songs that express thanksgiving are the least likely category of worship songs to be included in a service of worship.

13. Worship services in Southern Baptist churches are more likely to open with songs about the redeeming work of Christ followed by songs about God's nearness, love, and care for his children. Worship pastors expressed a relatively high degree of unpredictability about the categorical sequence of songs that appear in their worship services.
14. In general, the research from the WDP indicates that worship pastors in Southern Baptist churches tend to be more immanence focused than transcendence focused giving credence to the statement that the age of immanence has entered into Southern Baptist churches.

Conclusion

Empirically, the findings of the Worship Design Project 2014 have initially validated much of what was asserted anecdotally in chapter 2, "The Age of Immanence, Individualism, and the Modern View of God Expressed in American Worship." Worship services in Southern Baptist churches show signs of indeed being influenced by the age of immanence and our cultural tendency to rush past the transcendence of God in order to embrace the more immanent characteristics of God. This study is the first of its kind. Though I do not expect that any inaugural study can provide the final and definitive statement on any topic, the WDP concurs with and validates the voices of many who have decried the modern age of the church as one that overly embraces God's immanent characteristics at the expense of his transcendent characteristics, thereby leaving the church without the appropriate interpretive framework found in God's transcendence.

Is there a better or more appropriate way to approach worship design? For the worship pastors who are charged to weekly sculpt the vehicle through which their congregations will worship, is there a better or more biblically-modeled way to select and

sequence elements that comprise a service of worship without giving up freedom or giving in to our culture's propensity to rush toward God's immanence? Can the freedom of worship in Southern Baptist churches be maintained while applying biblical paradigms to its design and praxis? I believe the answer to each of these questions is yes and hinges on the recovery of a more biblically informed understanding of God in his transcendent otherness and his immanent nearness. The following chapters will provide an extensive examination of the biblical-historical grounding of the concept of God's transcendence, the biblical grounding of the concept of God's immanence being rooted in his transcendence, and the representation of the biblical sequence and pattern of transcendence then immanence represented in divine worship encounters and prayers recorded in the Bible.

CHAPTER 4
BIBLICAL HISTORICAL GROUNDING
OF TRANSCENDENCE

Introduction

Deus non est in genere encapsulates the motto of the early church fathers: “God is always greater.”¹ No matter how vast, expansive, or complex the human conceptions of God are, he is always grander than the mind can imagine or language can articulate.² Paul exclaims in Romans 11:33, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” God is always greater.

The difficulty of defining divine transcendence lies in finding or creating human language to describe and quantify that which is fundamentally ineffable and measureless. Essentially, transcendence is an all-encompassing term that describes the difference between God and all that is not God, between God and all that God created. Transcendence is central to how God reveals himself in Scripture and foundational to the proper development and application of liturgical theology. God is not the sum of all human virtues. Neither is God a superlative amalgamation of humanity’s greatest

¹Donald G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 34.

²A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), 45.

strengths or the “highest abstraction of human thought.”³ God is supernatural and suprahuman.

God’s transcendence cannot be defined without also considering God’s immanence. Although neither term is found in the Bible, transcendence and immanence are foundational concepts woven throughout the Old Testament and intensified by the New Testament writers who characterize God as both the one who is unapproachable *and* the one who dwells with his people.⁴ He is high, exalted, and separate; yet, he is pleased to abide in the hearts of his children. God is great and big, though small enough to reside in the human hearts of those he has redeemed. He is self-existent as well as self-relating—independent of all creation, yet intimately involved with the world he spoke into being. The idea that God who is absolutely and utterly other than his people would also dwell within his people by the Holy Spirit is a paradoxical irony.⁵

Though inextricably linked, transcendence and immanence will initially be surveyed in this dissertation separately. This chapter will specifically examine the biblical data and historical discourse that paint a striking portrait of the transcendence of God. Chapter 5 will examine his immanence.

³Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 84.

⁴Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2006), 45.

⁵Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope, 1993), 110.

Transcendence in Early Christianity

The early church fathers embraced the reality of God's transcendence and sought to establish and protect the supremacy of God's otherness. In the world of the patriarchs, according to G. L. Prestige's *God in Patristic Thought*, God's transcendence

. . . is vigorously maintained. Since transcendence, though a characteristically Hebrew idea, is nowhere philosophically expounded in the Bible, a term had to be adopted to express its definition. This was found in the word *agenetos*, "uncreated." The idea of creation was therein contrasted with that of self-grounded existence. To call God uncreated was tantamount to calling him infinite perfection, independent reality, and the source of all finite being. He alone is absolute; all else is dependent and contingent.⁶

Most of the early church fathers held that God is above and beyond all that is natural. According to Prestige,

God was firmly held to be supernatural in the deepest and truest sense. Philosophically, this idea was expressed by the word *υπεροχη* which may fairly be translated transcendence. The word occurs in Irenæus: God, he says (*haer.* 5.2.3), is the source of immortality and incorruption, for "out of His transcendence, not out of our own nature, do we possess eternal continuance."⁷

A more fully orb'd understanding of transcendence is more clearly articulated by Clement I, one of the earliest leaders of the church in Rome. Clement writes,

He who would worship God ought before all things to know what alone is peculiar to the nature of God, which cannot pertain to another, that, looking at his peculiarity, and not finding it in any other, he may not be seduced into ascribing godhead to another. But this is peculiar to God, that He alone is, as the maker of all, so also the best of all. That which makes is indeed superior in power to that which is made; that which is boundless is superior in magnitude to that which is bounded; in respect

⁶G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 2nd ed. (London: S.P.C.K., 1952), xx. Prestige also posits this characterization of early Christian thinking about God: "God, it was asserted, pervades the creation but is not confined to it. He is not represented as too far aloof, or too holy, to permit Himself to be contaminated by association with the physical world. . . . A place is kept both for divine creation and for divine immanence" (xx).

⁷*Ibid.*, 25. *υπεροχη* is a Greek noun that can be translated as wonderful, superiority, transcendence, excellence, supremacy, predominance, preponderance, eminence, preeminence, dominance, supremeness, superbness, and virtue, et al.

of beauty, that which is comeliest; in respect of happiness, that which is most blessed; in respect of understanding, that which is most perfect. And in like manner, in other respects, he has the preeminence [transcendence]. Since then, as I said, this very thing, viz. to be the best of all, is peculiar to God, and the all-comprehending world was made by him, none of the things made by Him can come into equal comparison with him.⁸

Origen highlights the transcendent life of God as beyond compare while Alexander strongly asserts God's incomparable transcendence over all things he called from non-existence into existence.⁹ An early second century Greek Christian, Aristides in his *Apology* echoes the transcendence-laden sentiment of the often-quoted statement of Aristotle that God is the unmoved mover. Believing that God is both the prime mover and sovereign ruler of the universe, Aristides makes this philosophical deduction, "everything that moves is more powerful than what is moved, and that which rules is more powerful than what is ruled."¹⁰

Though these early thoughts about God's transcendence do not constitute the fully developed philosophies and doctrines that would later be advanced, these concepts of transcendence embraced by the early church fathers would form the bedrock of classical biblical Theology Proper for centuries extending all the way through the

⁸Clement I, *Clementine Homilies* 10.19, reprinted in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 17, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870), 169. The penultimate sentence in this quote is sometimes translated, "And in like manner in other respects He incomparably possesses transcendence" (Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 26).

⁹Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John Books 1-10*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press, 1989), 127 (2.123); Alexander, *The Epistle of Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria to Alexander, Bishop of Constantinople*, preserved by Theodoret (Chapter 3), in *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, accessed January 8, 2014, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf203.iv.viii.i.iv.html>.

¹⁰Robert M. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1966), 17.

Enlightenment. The great gothic cathedrals of Europe donned with daunting buttresses and spires reaching toward heaven are an enduring testimony to the early and medieval theological dominance of thinking about God in his transcendent otherness and distinction from the created world.

Transcendence—A Qualitative Distinction

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, an influential Danish Christian philosopher and theologian in the nineteenth century, spoke of the difference between God and humans in terms of both a qualitative distinction and a dimensional beyondness. Humans are of a fundamentally different kind and cannot be understood as merely unlike God by degree. In other words, God should not be conceptualized by taking the most outstanding human qualities and magnifying those qualities. God is not a superlative form of a human. Kierkegaard believed that adding quantity to a substance could not change the essence or quality of a substance. In other words, to add water to a pond does not change the pond from being a pond. Water plus more water still equals water. Therefore, Kierkegaard stated that God is dimensionally different from humans in kind, not degree. God exists in another dimension from humans; the dimension, however, is not spatial but qualitative. For example, hearing exists in a different dimension from tasting. We would never play a chord on the piano and ask someone what the chord tastes like. Taste and hearing are two different senses. They exist on two different plains or in two different dimensions.¹¹ In a similar way, God's existence is distinct from human existence. He does not have a

¹¹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 341-42.

geographic location that can be accessed by travel. God is ubiquitous but inaccessible to our finiteness. He exists in a spiritual reality that cannot be accessed by the physical. In Kierkegaard's world, a human could only access God by experiencing a change of state by death to be translated from the physical to the spiritual.¹²

Karl Barth, a Swiss Reformed theologian and significant Christian philosopher of the twentieth century, writes of God's transcendence in his book *Der Romerbrief*.¹³ Barth, significantly influenced by Kierkegaard, asserts that God is altogether other, immensely above all other deities of New Testament times and all other future deities that the human mind could and would later construct. For Barth, God does not represent the best of human nature, nor is he a perfect aspect of a human being. Humans can neither produce any divine revelation nor do they have any iota of resemblance to God. Similar to Kierkegaard, Barth holds that an infinite qualitative distinction separates God from humans.¹⁴ "He is the hidden one; he cannot be discovered by our effort, verified by our intellectual proofs, or understood in terms of our concepts."¹⁵

God is irreducible to human categories. He is explainable only in himself. Jonathan L. Kvanvig in his article "Divine Transcendence" states, "A definition of God's transcendence is adequate only if that definition cites some property by virtue of God's having it, God is transcendent, and which is such that (i) God has it essentially, and (ii)

¹²Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 342.

¹³*Der Romerbrief* is Karl Barth's commentary on *The Epistle of Romans*.

¹⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God: Prolegomena to Church Dogmatics*, pt. 1, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 315.

¹⁵Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 340.

everything else lacks it essentially;” therefore, transcendence must be a modal notion.¹⁶

God is modally other than his creation, both spiritually and metaphysically. He exists apart from the “finite spatio-temporal” reality he created.¹⁷

Emil Brunner, also a reformed Swiss theologian of the twentieth century, writes that God is “absolutely and irrevocably different from all other forms of being.”¹⁸ Also, highlighting God’s distinction, Barth writes, “God stands at an infinite distance from everything else, not in the finite degree of difference with which created things stand toward each other.”¹⁹ God is absolutely different and wholly other than his creation.²⁰ The difference is one of quality not quantity, of dimension not degree—a transcendence of essence. Kierkegaard echoes this truth when he states, “God and man are two qualities between which there is an infinite qualitative difference. Every doctrine which overlooks this difference is . . . blasphemy.”²¹

Having examined a brief historical overview relating to the concept of God’s transcendence, it is now time to look at the biblical data that describes how God is

¹⁶Jonathan L. Kvanvig, “Divine Transcendence,” *Religious Studies* 20 (1984), 380, accessed October 26, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20006072>.

¹⁷Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 35.

¹⁸Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950, reprint 1974), 139.

¹⁹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God*, pt. 1, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 311.

²⁰Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 23.

²¹Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941), 207. Cf. “Between God and man there is and remains an eternal, essential, qualitative difference.” Kierkegaard, *On Authority and Revelation*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 112.

transcendent. To do so, the following eleven categories of transcendence will be highlighted: God's holiness, God as Creator, God's aseity, inter-Trinitarian love, God's simplicity, God's constancy, God's omnipotence, God's omniscience, God's omnipresence, God's timeless eternity, and God's infinity. The proper understanding of all of God's transcendent attributes begins with the first two foundational concepts: 1) God's holiness and 2) God as Creator.

God's Transcendent Holiness

God is gloriously transcendent in his holiness. Isaiah records these words of God, "To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One" (Isa 40:25). God is holy. Holiness is not one description of many but is a unique summative description of God's ontological being in its entirety.²² The concept of God's holiness has an uncompromised and unqualified quality to it. God can choose to express love or choose not to express love; however, God cannot choose whether to be holy or to express his holiness. Holiness is intrinsic to who God is essentially.

Distinct from the physical and separate from the fallen, the concept of the holiness of God is so profound and so unique that it is almost incomprehensible for the human mind.²³ Holiness is "an array of God's moral perfections" and "signifies his majestic inviolability."²⁴ "Holiness is not one of many descriptions of God; it is the

²²Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 45.

²³Ibid., 43.

²⁴David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 102; and Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 137.

summary designation of all that God is and is known to be in contrast to all of creation.”²⁵

Anthony Hoekema concurs and states that God’s holiness “is not so much a separate attribute as a qualification of all that God is and does.”²⁶

The song of the seraphim in Isaiah 6 resounds, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” *Kadosh* is the Hebrew word for holy.²⁷ The tripartite Hebrew expression *kadosh, kadosh, kadosh* (holy, holy, holy) used in Isaiah 6 was the ancient way of describing not only an exceptional quality, but also an unmatched superlative attribute. The concept of holiness is wrapped in distinctiveness—a distinctiveness of purity, a separateness from all that is unclean—and a uniqueness of being set apart from that which is common, ordinary, or profane.²⁸ In fact, the Hebrew antonym of *kadosh* is *khol* which can be translated as *profane*. God describes his own uniqueness when he says these words in Isaiah 57:15a, “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place.’”

God’s majestic otherness is wrapped in utter moral purity, an “unpolluted freedom from all evil.”²⁹ Holiness is the “fundamental statement of who God is and what

²⁵Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 45.

²⁶Anthony Hoekema, “The Attributes of God: The Communicable Attributes,” in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 31.

²⁷The Greek word for holy is *hagios*.

²⁸Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, The New American Commentary, vol. 15a (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2007), 190.

²⁹Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 2:114.

he is like.”³⁰ God is “essentially and necessarily holy. It is the essential glory of his nature.”³¹ God’s holiness stands in stark relief from frail, weak, and sinful man. His holiness stands arrayed against sinful and unrighteous mankind and requires absolute exclusivity in allegiance and worship.³² God commands his name to be revered as holy. Jesus taught his disciples to pray like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed [holy] be your name” (Matt 6:9). The second commandment outlining God’s covenant expectations with his people stresses the importance of reverencing the holy name of God. God speaks these words, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain” (Exod 20:7). The psalmist records this exclamation in Psalm 97:12, “Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!” God said this to the house of Israel in preparation for the giving of a new and better covenant, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came” (Ezek 36:22b).

Psalm 99 is an excellent example, forever etched in the ancient Hebrew hymnbook, that reminds worshipers of all generations for all time that the wellspring of worship begins at the fountainhead of holiness:

¹The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
²The LORD is great in Zion;
he is exalted over all the peoples.
³Let them praise your great and awesome name!

³⁰Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 103.

³¹Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:115.

³²Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 138.

Holy is he!

⁴The King in his might loves justice.

You have established equity;
you have executed justice
and righteousness in Jacob.

⁵Exalt the LORD our God;
worship at his footstool!

Holy is he!

⁶Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel also was among those who called upon his name.

They called to the LORD, and he answered them.

⁷In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them;
they kept his testimonies
and the statute that he gave them.

⁸O LORD our God, you answered them;
you were a forgiving God to them,
but an avenger of their wrongdoings.

⁹Exalt the LORD our God,
and worship at his holy mountain;
for the LORD our God is holy! [emphasis mine]

Now and throughout all eternity, God's transcendent holiness will be declared.

John the Revelator records this image of the heavenly host making this perpetual declaration: "And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!'" (Rev 4:8). Stand in awe of the transcendent God of wonder whose sheer and utter holiness—his distinction from the created and his separation from all impurity— is perpetually being declared around the throne in heaven.

God as Transcendent Creator

God is gloriously transcendent as Creator. God, the first cause of all that exists, is the prime mover, the unmoved mover, and the great *a posteriori* designer of all.³³ Genesis opens with a revelational assertion about who God is. “In the beginning, God created” sets the stage for all subsequent scriptural revelations about God. God is informing humanity that he is the source of all. All that is can be divided into two categories: the created and the uncreated. As the uncreated one, God is the originator, source, and designer of all that is in existence.³⁴ He is discontinuous with the natural world.³⁵ As the uncreated one, God is the unmoved mover. As Creator, he is the unoriginated one, the one who never transitioned from non-existence into existence.³⁶

God initially chose to reveal himself as Creator and as the one and only Creator. The Hebrew word for *create* is the term *bara* meaning to fashion from nothing, sometimes referred to as creating *ex nihilo*, out of nothing.³⁷ In the creation account, *bara* occurs six times. The remarkable feature of this passage is that God is always the subject of *bara*.³⁸ No other person, object, or perceived deity has ever created from nothing. Creating is an exclusive and transcendent characteristic of God. God spoke

³³Daniel L. Akin, *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 181.

³⁴Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 5.

³⁵Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 23.

³⁶Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 38.

³⁷Akin, *A Theology for the Church*, 254.

³⁸ Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1a (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2007), 128.

matter, time, and space into existence.³⁹ “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). Thomas Aquinas, a noted medieval scholastic and philosopher, states, “That the world began is an article of faith taught by Scripture.”⁴⁰ Because God spoke creation into existence and he himself being the uncreated one, God as Creator is distinct from his creation. Therefore, all that is can essentially be divided into two categories: the Creator and that which is created. Creation bares the fingerprints of the Creator God and continually declares his praise.

¹The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

²Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.

³There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.

⁴Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world. (Ps 19:1-4)

Perhaps the strongest Scripture categorically reminding human beings of the difference between them and the Creator God is found in Job 38-41. The following is a small sample of the words that God declared to Job:

⁴Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.

⁵Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?

⁶On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone,

⁷when the morning stars sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4-7)

³⁹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 169.

⁴⁰Akin, *A Theology for the Church*, 254.

The entirety of Job 38-41 not only demonstrates profoundly the difference between Creator God and his creation but also instructs that all created reality is lesser reality. All other existence, both matter as well as quality (i.e., beauty, goodness, power, holiness, kindness, mercy), are absolutely derivative from the source of all things, God, who possesses all perfections intrinsically, exhaustively, and perfectly.⁴¹ Stand in awe of the transcendent God of wonder who alone creates from nothing and who alone is uncreated.

God's Transcendent Self-Existence (Aseity)

God is gloriously transcendent in his eternal independent self-existence, self-sufficiency, and self-containment. Some theologians use the word *aseity* as a summative term capturing the essence of each of these descriptors of God. *Aseity* is derived from the Latin, *a se* meaning “from himself.” Essentially, *aseity* means that God exists in absolute fullness, completeness, and wholeness. He is the great I AM—pure being—who existed in absolute completeness prior to creation and who will continue to exist in absolute completeness throughout all eternity.

According to A. W. Tozer, a notable twentieth century pastor and theologian, God's independence is “the essential and fundamental attribute of the divine nature.”⁴² Independence and self-sufficiency mean that creation is not necessary to God and cannot limit God. God is both independent of creation, superior to creation, and needs nothing from his creation.⁴³ He is intrinsically self-sufficient and absolutely complete within

⁴¹Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 49.

⁴²S. F. Davenport, *Immanence and Incarnation* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 126.

⁴³Millard J. Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine*

himself.⁴⁴ The Apostle Paul heralds God's self-sufficiency in Romans 11:34-36: "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

As the self-sufficient one, God can never receive some quality that he previously lacked. He can never be added to. Humans cannot add value or fill any void in an infinitely self-contained, voidless God. God is the "one who contains all, who gives all that is given, but who Himself can receive nothing that He has not first given."⁴⁵ God has no inherent need of his creation or anything from creation. "To admit the existence of a need in God is to admit incompleteness in the divine Being. Need is a creature-word and cannot be spoken of the Creator. God has a voluntary relation to everything He has made, but He has no necessary relation to anything outside of himself."⁴⁶ Bruce Ware makes this poignant observation:

God exists eternally independent of his creation, possessing within himself, intrinsically and infinitely, every quality and perfection. All goodness is God's goodness, and he possesses it in infinite measure. All beauty is God's beauty, and he possesses it in infinite measure. All power and wisdom and every perfection or quality that exists, exists in God, who possesses each and every one infinitely and intrinsically. Therefore, God needs none of what he has made, and nothing external to God can contribute anything to him, for in principle nothing can be added to this One who possesses already every quality without measure. Instead, everything that exists external to God does so only because God has granted it existence and has filled it with any and every quality it possesses.⁴⁷

Attributes (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 256.

⁴⁴Rob Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 246.

⁴⁵Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 32.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 182.

As the all-sufficient one, God is completely independent. God never needs help. He never asks for assistance. He is never needy for anything that the world may have to give. No created, derivative thing could ever give back to God anything that adds to his possessions or to his value. Simply put, God does not need the world that he has made. Barth states it this way: “God is not dependent on anything that is not Himself; on anything outside Himself. He is not limited by anything outside Himself, and is not subject to any necessity distinct from Himself. On the contrary, everything that exists is dependent on His will.”⁴⁸ The psalmist writing in Psalm 50:10-12 records God’s own declaration that he does not need nor will he ever need anything from creation.⁴⁹

¹⁰For every beast of the forest is mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.

¹¹I know all the birds of the hills,
and all that moves in the field is mine.

¹²If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and its fullness are mine.

In a similar way, Luke echoes Psalm 50 highlighting God’s independence in Acts 17:24-25 saying, “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” Stand in awe of the independent God of wonder. Marvel at his exhaustive self-sufficiency, and stand amazed at his eternal self-existence.

⁴⁸Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:560.

⁴⁹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 161.

Inter-Trinitarian Love

God's ontological completeness and absolute self-sufficiency is found totally within the holy Trinity—the Godhead comprised of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Within the Trinity, complete and perfect fellowship and communion exist.⁵⁰ Prior to the foundations of the world, God loved eternally. Love is an intrinsic quality of God. Love is not simply something that God does, love is an expression of who God is essentially and ontologically.⁵¹ The love of God is expressed eternally within the Trinity, a singularly unique characteristic of Christianity among other monotheistic traditions. For example, Allah, the supreme deity in the religion of Islam, does not exist in tri-unity. Therefore, Allah cannot possess love intrinsically. How could he love intrinsically if no intrinsic object of his love exists? In contrast, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have eternally existed in social unity and love. They constantly ascribe glory to one another and express love to one another that far surpasses anything a human could ascribe or express to God.⁵² God is relationally complete and fulfilled within the Trinity.

Scripture attests to the eternal love between the Father and the Son. The Son has always been the object of his Father's love, and the Father has always been the object of his Son's love. God's love for his Son is recorded in John's chronicle of the high priestly prayer where Jesus says, "you loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). Jesus references his own love for his Father when he states, "but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father." The New

⁵⁰Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 161.

⁵¹Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 98.

⁵²Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 161.

Testament is filled with markers that highlight inter-Trinitarian love and beauty of relationship. The Son loves the Father and expresses his love through obedience to his Father's will (John 14:31; 8:29). The Father glorifies the Son (John 8:50, 54; 13:32; 17:1, 5, 22, 24), and the Son glorifies the Father (John 13:31, 32; 14:12; 17:1, 4). The Holy Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son (John 16:14). The Son honors the Father, and the Father honors the Son (John 5:19-23).

God's eternal love existed before any created thing was the object of his love. When God created the heavens and the earth, he did not create out of a sense of need, desperation, or deficiency.⁵³ God in no way needs human relationship, fellowship, affection, or worship. Because God has forever been three persons existing in perfect relationship together, he has never been in need of companionship, even before the creation of the world. He was (and is) whole and complete in and of himself. God never experiences loneliness or finds himself in need of companionship apart from himself because perfect love among the persons of the Trinity has always existed from all eternity.⁵⁴ God does not create to fulfill a relational void. Inter-Trinitarian love needs no supplement or addition. John Piper, respected evangelical theologian, author, and pastor, explains this divinely transcendent kind of love in this way:

From all eternity, even before there were any human beings to love, God has been overflowingly happy in his love for the Son. He has never been lonely. He has always rejoiced, with overflowing satisfaction, in the glory and partnership of his Son. . . . God is not constrained by any inner deficiency or unhappiness to do anything he does not want to do. If God were unhappy, if he were in some way deficient, then he might indeed be constrained from outside in some way to do what

⁵³Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 190.

⁵⁴Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 161.

he does not want to do, in order to make up his deficiency and finally to be happy. This is what distinguishes us from God. We have an immense void inside that craves satisfaction from powers and persons and pleasures outside ourselves. Yearning and longing and desire are the very stuff of our nature. We are born deficient and needy and dissatisfied. . . . But God is not like that. He has been complete and overflowing with satisfaction from all eternity. . . . No one can offer anything to him that doesn't already come from him. . . . So no one can bribe God or coerce him in any way.⁵⁵

Stand in awe of the transcendent, self-sufficient Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who have loved one another supremely throughout all eternity.

God's Transcendent Simplicity

God is gloriously transcendent in his divine simplicity. God is one. He is not many. Divine simplicity is not a statement about God's naiveté or austerity. Rather, divine simplicity means that God is indivisible; he is one. The idea of oneness has two meanings—uniqueness (*singularitas*) and simplicity (*simplicitas*). When the idea of oneness is applied to God, both meanings are fully represented.⁵⁶ According to Barth, no idea is more revolutionary or more dangerous than the statement, "God is one."⁵⁷

God is indivisible; he cannot be divided into separate parts.⁵⁸ God is not an amalgamation of complex parts or attributes. People sometimes focus on a singular aspect of God; nevertheless, God is always and in every way completely and entirely himself. Simplicity is the opposite of multiplicity and expresses God's inability to be

⁵⁵John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, rev. ed. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2000), 48-49.

⁵⁶Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:442.

⁵⁷Ibid., 444.

⁵⁸Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 90.

parceled into individual parts. God is noncomposite.⁵⁹ He is not a collection of his attributes added together; rather, his infinitely perfect attributes coalesce in unity to form the one essence of the indivisible, eternal God.”⁶⁰

Scripture never places one attribute of God as more important or more prominent than another attribute. Each attribute is true of all of God. For example, the psalmist may say that God is powerful (Ps 29:4) and then later say that God is good (Ps 34:8). It would be incorrect to say that part of God is powerful and a part of God is good. Rather, God himself is powerful, and God himself is good. Every attribute of God is completely true of all of God and all of the character of God.⁶¹ Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* expresses the doctrine of divine simplicity in this way, “The perfect unity of God requires that what are manifold and divided in others should exist in Him simply and unitedly. Thus it comes about that He is one in reality, and yet many in idea, because our intellect apprehends Him in a manifold manner, just as things represent him in a manifold manner.”⁶²

The human mind regularly apprehends God in part rather than in whole. Humans often focus on a specific attribute or highlight a unique quality; yet, care must be taken to acknowledge that complexity, parts, and separation are not characteristic of God.⁶³ He is never less than wholly and completely himself. God is completely

⁵⁹Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 145.

⁶⁰Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 180.

⁶¹Ibid., 178.

⁶²Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, vol. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, rev. Daniel J. Sullivan (Chicago: William Benton, 1952), 66.

⁶³William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God*

“in-dividual” and indivisible.⁶⁴

God’s simplicity and uniqueness are also expressed in this way: the possibility of another god does not exist. No other additional god or subsequent god will ever exist within or outside of the Godhead.⁶⁵ The Lord spoke these words in Isaiah 44:6, “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.’” Again in Deuteronomy 4:35, Moses records these words, “To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him.”

Divine unity and simplicity should also be understood as applying to each member of the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶ The Godhead exists as three individual persons who are one in nature, each member of the Trinity possessing all divine qualities and attributes in full and undivided measure. “His substance is indivisible. He has no parts but is single in His unitary being.”⁶⁷ Thus, it can rightly be said that the Trinity is one, indivisible into parts, never less than wholly and completely God, simple.⁶⁸ God is one with himself. Tozer in *The Knowledge of the*

Went Wrong (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 23.

⁶⁴Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:446-47.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 445.

⁶⁶“The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten,” says the Athanasian Creed. “The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son: not made, nor created, not begotten, but proceeding.”

⁶⁷Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 15.

⁶⁸Barth highlights the implications of God’s simplicity as follows, “Being simple in the sense described, God is incomparably free, sovereign and majestic. In this quality of simplicity are rooted, fixed and included all the other attributes of His majesty: His constancy and eternity, His omnipresence, omnipotence and glory. Nothing can affect Him, or be far from Him, or contradict or withstand Him,

Holy states: “This doctrine of divine unity means not only that there is but one God; it means also that God is simple, uncomplex, one with Himself. The harmony of His being is the result not of a perfect balance of parts but of the absence of parts.”⁶⁹ Stand in awe of the transcendent, indivisible God of wonder who is one.

The Transcendent Freedoms of God

The next set of God’s transcendent attributes can be subsumed under the umbrella of God’s absolute and complete freedom. God is unequivocally free, and his freedom is an unqualified, absolute freedom. In his freedom, no one or no thing can hinder him, coerce him, or stop him. God has always and will always be able to do as he wishes, anytime, in any place, forever.⁷⁰ The freedom of God is expressed in his transcendent constancy, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, timeless eternity, and infinity. I begin with an exploration of God’s constancy.

God’s Transcendent Constancy

God is gloriously transcendent in his eternal constancy. The constancy of God is an expression of God’s absolute freedom.⁷¹ Classical theologians often use the term *immutable*. Instead, I will use the Barthian term *constance* or *constancy* to describe the unchangeable nature of God. God’s constancy means that he is eternally consistent. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8). God neither varies nor can he be

because in Himself there is no separation, distance, contradiction or opposition” (Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:445).

⁶⁹Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 15.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 109.

⁷¹Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:490.

altered.⁷² He is not fickle or capricious. He can neither change for the better nor take a turn for the worse.

Pressing the idea of constancy further, God's essence and perfections are perpetually fixed and immovable. His nature never changes.⁷³ His integrity is invariable and inviolable. God's moral eternal character never fluctuates or varies; therefore, the standards by which God defines goodness, holiness, and righteousness are permanently unchanging.⁷⁴ "Since he is perfectly holy, he has never been less holy than he is now and can never be holier than he is and has always been."⁷⁵ Sinless perfection has always been true of God and will always be true of God.

The reality that God's character never changes is of a higher order than the reality that his word never changes. God's character cannot be other than it is. However, God's words can either be declared or not declared as determined by the sovereign will and choice of God. God is not compelled to give any word; therefore, the constancy of

⁷²Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1:316.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Classical theism envisioned God as totally unchangeable (*immutabilitas*) and hence unable to suffer or experience emotion (*impassibilitas*). This position was held by the early church fathers and medieval theologians like Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas in addition to later being reflected in Reformation and post-Reformation orthodoxy (Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 91). Stephen Charnock, Puritan divine and representative of post-Reformation theologians states, "If God doth change, it must be either to a greater perfection than he had before, or to a less. . . . If he changes to acquire a perfection he had not, then he was not before the most excellent being" (Stephen Charnock, *Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God*, vol. 1 [New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1874], 331). However, more recent theological reflection contends that, though God's essence and character never change (ontological immutability), his disposition (divine emotion) appropriately changes in response to a human's moral state. This kind of change is called relational mutability and will be discussed further in chap. 5. For a more in-depth study of God's relational mutability, see Bruce Ware, "An Evangelical Reexamination of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1984) and Rob Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

⁷⁵Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 49.

God's word carries with it a contingent nature. Once God decides to give a word or make a decree, His word and decrees are then consistent and unalterable. What God says will assuredly come to pass. His promises are reliable and his decrees are assured.⁷⁶ Isaiah 40:8 highlights the eternally enduring nature of God's declarations when he states, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." Likewise in Ezekiel 12:25a, the Lord speaks these words, "For I am the Lord; I will speak the word that I will speak, and it will be performed."

Not only does God's character and word not change, but also God's essence never changes. God can never be added to or taken away from.⁷⁷ God's essential existence as the triune Godhead is eternally invariable. He has always existed as Trinity, and God will always exist as Trinity. There is never any variation in God's essence. James highlights God's unchangeability in 1:17b when he states, "there is no variation or shadow due to change." The psalmist writes in Psalm 102:27, "but you are the same, and your years have no end."

Herman Bavinck states that God's constancy is of the utmost importance in establishing transcendence and understanding the Creator-creature distinction.⁷⁸ He makes this statement concerning God's unchangeability:

The doctrine of God's immutability is of the highest significance for religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the Creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, seeks rest and satisfaction, and finds this rest in God, in him alone, for only he is pure being and not becoming. Hence, in Scripture God is often called the

⁷⁶Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 141.

⁷⁷Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:284.

⁷⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 163.

Rock. . . .⁷⁹

Unfulfilled potential does not exist in God; he never possesses promise of some future improvement.⁸⁰ He never grows, develops, or matures.⁸¹ God can never be updated or upgraded. As one who neither sleeps nor slumbers, God never experiences degeneration, atrophy, deterioration, or regeneration.⁸² He can neither be added to nor taken away from.⁸³ He will never be something tomorrow that he is not today. His creativity never develops. His strength never grows. His wisdom never matures. His purity never increases. God is never at any point intermittent.⁸⁴ God never changes for the better or for the worse. He is invariable and unalterable. He never differs from himself.⁸⁵ At all times and for all time, he constantly remains true to himself and to his purposes.⁸⁶ In Malachi 3:6a, God declares, “I the Lord do not change.” Stand in awe of the transcendent, immutable, constant God of wonder.

God’s Transcendent Omnipotence

God is gloriously transcendent in his unlimited omnipotence. As God’s constancy is an expression of God’s freedom, so too is his omnipotence. God is free to

⁷⁹Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. William Hendricksen (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 149.

⁸⁰Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 160.

⁸¹Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 49.

⁸²Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:491.

⁸³Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:284.

⁸⁴Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:494.

⁸⁵Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 49.

⁸⁶Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 94.

do anything he decides to do.⁸⁷ *Omnipotent* is derived from the two Latin words *omni* and *potens* meaning “all-powerful.”⁸⁸ God is all-powerful. He possesses an “incomprehensive plenitude of power, a potency that is absolute.”⁸⁹ God’s power and strength cannot be defined in human terms. God is not simply a superlative of the strongest human. Neither is God the sum of all human might.⁹⁰ Rather, God is limitless power and exerts his power over all things. God can never be more or less powerful. His power is unstoppable and utterly immense. The limitlessness of God’s power is beyond human comprehension. In fact, the Bible teaches that God’s powerful abilities surpass human mental capacities to understand. Paul declares in Ephesians 3:20 that God’s abilities are immeasurably more than the human mind can imagine.

Omnipotence means that God has no external constraints. God cannot be stopped by any outside force nor can his plans ever be thwarted. Nothing is too difficult for God. The angel Gabriel told Mary concerning Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist that “nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). Christ echoed this truth when he proclaims in Matthew 19:26b, “with God all things are possible.”

Not only is God all-powerful, but also he commands all powers of the universe. When God acts, he acts without effort. He never grows tired or weary when exerting his power. He never needs time to replenish his power or to be rejuvenated in any way. God’s exertion is completely effortless. The power “to do all that He wills to do lies in

⁸⁷Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 216.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 65.

⁹⁰Ibid., 67.

undiminished fullness in His own infinite being.”⁹¹ God’s inexhaustible power enables him to do anything that is possible to be done, anything that he ordains, or anything that he decrees.⁹² God can actualize any and every genuine possibility.⁹³ God’s power, though absolutely unlimited, does have one restriction. The exercise of God’s power will never contradict his character or nature.⁹⁴

Scripture is replete with descriptions and references to God’s power. Perhaps the most used term expressing God’s limitless power is encapsulated in the Hebrew phrase *El Shaddai* translated in English as *God Almighty*, *God the Almighty*, or *Almighty God*. *Almighty* could also be rendered as *all-powerful*. In the Old Testament, *almighty* is used in reference to God forty-eight times. The first appearance of this reference to God’s unlimited power appears in Genesis 17 when the transcendent God of the universe appeared to Abraham, identified himself, and then gave him a charge with these words: “I am God Almighty [*El Shaddai*]; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly” (Gen 17:1-2). Thirty-one of the forty-eight Old Testament references to God as almighty appear in the book of Job—a book containing some of the most stunning descriptions of God by God himself as the transcendent Creator and ruler of the universe.

The Greek word for almighty, *pantokratōr*, is found ten times in the New Testament. Nine of the ten times, *pantokratōr* is used in the book of Revelation where

⁹¹Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 67.

⁹²Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:13.

⁹³Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:532.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 535.

God's power is highlighted at the final and complete consummation of his kingdom.⁹⁵

Picturing this consummation at the great Marriage Supper of the Lamb, John the Revelator records this vision in Revelation 19:6, "Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.'"

A variety of other Scripture also highlights the unlimited power of God. Psalm 24:8 speaks of God's strength in war, "Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle!" Jeremiah recognizes that the Creator God has absolutely no limitations when he muses, "Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you" (Jer 32:17). Later in chapter 32, God reminds Jeremiah of this truth, "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?" Job expresses a profound statement of praise as he recognized that God has the power to both give and take away life and possessions. His often quoted statement is recorded in Job 1:21b, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." The writer of Hebrews declares the limitless power of God's word to uphold and to

⁹⁵*Almighty* is "used of God 48 times in the OT (31 of them in Job) to translate Heb. *šaddai*, and following LXX in some verses, Gk. *pantokratōr*. Interpreted by early Jewish commentators as 'the all-sufficient' (*hikanos* in Jewish—Greek OT versions of 2nd century AD and later). Modern scholars offer a wide range of derivations, none certain. Outside the OT the name apparently occurs in the Tell Deir Alla Aramaic text c. 700 BC (*WRITING) in the plural form *šdyn*, denoting supernatural beings. Within the OT *šaddai* carries ideas of power to injure and protect (Pss 68:14; 91:1; Isa 13:6; Joel 1:15). The name is used six times in relation to the Patriarchs, as stated in Exod 6:3, sometimes in the compound 'ēl *šaddai*, 'God Almighty.' Each case concerns the promise of blessing upon Abraham and his descendants, again with the note of power. In Job 'the Almighty' stands as a poetic parallel to 'God' as also in Ruth 1:20–21 to Yahweh, showing their identity for the writers of these books. Gk. *pantokrator* ('all-powerful') occurs in 2 Cor 6:18, and nine times in Revelation, where the power of God is stressed (Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22)" (*New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd. ed. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996], s.v. "Almighty").

sustain the universe (Heb 1:3). Perhaps Isaiah 46 best describes God's power to accomplish anything that he purposes.⁹⁶ These are God's own words about himself recorded in Isaiah 46:9b-10,

^{9b}For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me,
¹⁰declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, "My counsel shall stand,
and I will accomplish all my purpose."

Omnipotence and sovereignty are connected attributes of God.⁹⁷ Sovereignty is the exercise of God's power over his creation and has both transcendent and immanent dimensions.⁹⁸ As Creator, God stands above his creation and stands over his creation as sovereign and rightful ruler. As Creator, God is exclusively sovereign and the lawful owner of all that is. As rightful owner, he is self-endowed with authority and fully entitled to rule over his creation.⁹⁹ Because of God's unlimited power, he is able to sovereignly reign over his kingdom with all authority and every ability needed to rule over his creation.¹⁰⁰ No greater authority exists than God's authority. He answers to no one; therefore, he stands alone as the all-powerful sovereign King of glory. God's power is limitless and glorious in its expression throughout his dominion. Stand in awe of the transcendent, omnipotent, unlimited God of wonder.

⁹⁶John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 47.

⁹⁷Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 65.

⁹⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 217.

⁹⁹Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 106.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 108.

God's Transcendent Omniscience

God is gloriously transcendent in his eternal and infinite omniscience expressed through his exhaustive knowledge of all things past, all things present, all things future, and all things possible. The exhaustive knowledge of God is called omniscience, meaning “all-knowing.” The biblical attestation to the omniscient nature of God is overwhelming.¹⁰¹ The next two sections will briefly examine the nature of God's knowledge and the implications of God's omniscience.

The nature of God's knowledge. As previously stated, God knows all things past, present, future, and possible. He knows all that can be known; his knowledge is fully perfect and exhaustively complete.¹⁰² Barth makes this assertion, “That which is not knowable and known by him does not exist, either as actuality or possibility.”¹⁰³

In addition, God's knowledge of all things is instantaneous and effortless.¹⁰⁴ God's knowledge is not successive or progressive.¹⁰⁵ He does not know one thing now and then another thing tomorrow. God does not know one thing better than any other thing but knows all things equally well and equally comprehensive.¹⁰⁶ God's knowledge is bereft of ambiguity and is always free from error.¹⁰⁷ The amount of God's knowledge

¹⁰¹Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 194.

¹⁰²Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 55.

¹⁰³Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:552.

¹⁰⁴Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 56.

¹⁰⁵Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:284.

¹⁰⁶Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 56.

¹⁰⁷Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:555.

does not change or grow. Neither does a portion of God’s knowledge fade into nonconscious memory.¹⁰⁸

God’s knowledge encompasses all things visible and invisible, including the hidden thoughts and actions of his creatures.¹⁰⁹ Psalm 90:8 states, “You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.” The writer of Hebrews states, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:13 NIV). In short, God is fully aware of all things at all times.

One remarkable aspect of God’s omniscience is his exhaustive divine foreknowledge. Divine foreknowledge means that God has meticulous and definite knowledge of everything that will occur in the entire universe.¹¹⁰ God’s comprehensive foreknowledge preceded his creative action that brought the universe into being and includes all future actions, choices, and thoughts of his morally free creatures. There is nothing that God does not know or cannot know.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 191.

¹⁰⁹Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 56.

¹¹⁰Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 99.

¹¹¹Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory*, 141. For a limited but substantial portion of Scripture indicative of God’s exhaustive foreknowledge, see Deut 31:16-21; Ps 139:4, 16; Isa 41:21-29; 42:8-9; 43:8-13; 44:6-8, 24-28; 45:1-7, 18-25; 46:8-11; 48:3-8; and predictions in Dan 2; 4; 5; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11. For a more comprehensive exposition of God’s exhaustive divine foreknowledge, see Bruce Ware’s *God’s Lesser Glory*, 99-141. Middle knowledge is also an aspect of God’s omniscience. God’s middle knowledge means that God knows any and all possibilities of “what would have occurred had circumstances been different, contrary to what did in fact occur” (Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 117). For more on God’s middle knowledge, see Bruce Ware’s *God’s Greater Glory*, 110-30.

Implications of God’s omniscience. The fascinating implications of God’s omniscience are enormous. Because God is all-knowing, he is never uncertain. God has never acquired new knowledge and never discovers anything new. Memorization is an unknown activity for God. He never receives an insight or changes from ignorant to enlightened on any topic.¹¹² Because God’s knowledge is simultaneous and not sequentially amassed, he is never surprised or amazed.¹¹³ God never learns or needs to learn something that he did not know. No one can instruct God or teach him something that he does not already know. Isaiah 40:13-14 states:

¹³Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord,
or what man shows him his counsel?
¹⁴Whom did he consult,
and who made him understand?
Who taught him the path of justice,
and taught him knowledge,
and showed him the way of understanding?

In *Systematic Theology*, professor and noted theologian Wayne Grudem gives further insight into God’s omniscience:

If he should wish to tell us the number of grains of sand on the seashore or the number of stars in the sky, he would not have to count them all quickly like some kind of giant computer, nor would he have to call the number to mind because it was something he had not thought about for a time. Rather, he always knows all things at once. All of these facts and all other things that he knows are always fully present in his consciousness. He does not have to reason to conclusions or ponder before he answers, for he knows the end from the beginning.¹¹⁴

The vastness of God’s knowledge and thoughts is incomprehensible by the human mind. Paul enumerates this fact to the church at Corinth when he says, “no one

¹¹²Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:332; see also 1:426.

¹¹³Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 194.

¹¹⁴Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 191.

comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:11b). Nothing is or can be concealed from God; he is all-knowing. Stand in awe of the transcendent God of wonder whose knowledge knows no limits.

God’s Transcendent Omnipresence

As with many of God’s attributes, omnipresence possesses both a transcendent dimension and an immanent dimension. This section will focus primarily on the transcendent dimension of God’s omnipresence.

God is gloriously transcendent in his eternal omnipresence. Essentially, omnipresence means that God, all of God, fills up all of creation. God’s omnipresence is a function of his infinite freedom. God is absolutely free to be in all parts of space simultaneously. Parts of God are not everywhere. Rather, all of God is everywhere.¹¹⁵

Nothing is ever remote from God, though God is simultaneously remote and proximal to his creation.¹¹⁶ Omnipresence is a direct result of God’s creative volition. When God created in Genesis 1:1, he created both time and space and, as an act of his will, decided to fill every part of his creation with himself. Every part of God fills up every part of creation. In creation, God became both omnipresent and omnitemporal while “remaining, in himself and apart from creation, fully nonspatial and timelessly eternal.”¹¹⁷ He was not compelled by his own character or nature to do this, but as a

¹¹⁵Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:366.

¹¹⁶Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:461.

¹¹⁷Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 136.

volitional expression of his glory, God chose to inhabit his creation rather than exist apart from his creation.¹¹⁸ According to Ware,

Prior to the creation of the world, God existed in himself, apart from any spatio-temporal reality, in the fullness of his infinite and glorious existence, as transcending both space and time, being essentially (i.e., in his essence or nature) both nonspatial and atemporal. . . . When he created the heavens and earth, he brought into being their two-fold dimensions of spatiality and temporality.¹¹⁹

God's nature is neither bound by space nor tied to any one particular place in space.¹²⁰ King Solomon made this observation at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!" (1 Kgs 8:27)

A closely related term to omnipresence is the word *immensity*. Omnipresence and immensity are often used interchangeably. According to Jon Tal Murphee in *Divine Paradoxes*,

God's immensity means that He is infinite in relation to space and that he cannot be contained in any measurable frame. He is without measurable extension; he is above space, not circumscribed by it. God's essence is neither diffusible nor expandable. It is not spatially limited. God's magnitude cannot be calculated in centimeters, miles, or light-years.¹²¹

God is vaster than any place, collection of places, or all places combined.¹²² He cannot be measured and exists without size or physical dimension or boundary.¹²³

¹¹⁸Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 48.

¹¹⁹Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 136.

¹²⁰Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:369.

¹²¹Jon Tal Murphee, *Divine Paradoxes: A Finite View of an Infinite God. A Response to Process and Openness Theologies* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1998), 95.

¹²²Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:371.

¹²³Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 175.

God's immensity means that God is no *where*. In his book *God the Father Almighty*, Millard Erickson explains that the concept *where* "simply does not apply to God. He does not have location in the sense that physical objects have location. He is of a different nature than physical objects, and therefore cannot be located."¹²⁴ Thus, one can rightly conclude that God is dimensionally dissimilar from the physical world. God is non-finite and exclusively possesses the transcendent quality of ubiquity.¹²⁵

Though God is present in every part of the universe, he is, nevertheless, distinct from it. God possesses the space he created, inhabits the space he created, but is not defined by the space he created.¹²⁶ God's divine decision to inhabit space in no way diminishes his deity or limits him.¹²⁷

Though I have singularly focused on the transcendent aspects of omnipresence, God's ubiquity, divine sovereignty, and his immanence are closely interconnected attributes. In the following chapter, God's lordship over space and in space, God's presence in and with his creation, and divine paradoxes that relate to divine omnipresence and immanence will be discussed. For now, stand in awe of the inescapable God who fills every part of creation with all of himself.

God's Transcendent, Timeless Eternality

God is gloriously transcendent in his eternal timelessness. God is the Lord of time, the Lord in time, the Lord apart from time, and the Lord above time. God is both

¹²⁴Erickson, *God the Father Almighty*, 271.

¹²⁵Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 87.

¹²⁶Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 173.

¹²⁷Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:470.

everlasting through time as well as timelessly eternal. As one who is completely free, God is not bound or limited by time, can choose to fill all of time with himself, and stands above and outside of time as Lord and Creator.¹²⁸ When thinking about God’s relationship to time, it is helpful to think about God as he existed prior to creation and then about God who will continue to exist after creation has passed away. First, let us think about God prior to creation.

God’s pre-creational timelessness and supratemporality. Time (and space) is a dimension of the created world—a direct result of God’s creative initiative. Prior to creation, time did not exist. Preceding the astounding moments recorded in Genesis 1, God’s existence was completely nonspatial and nontemporal.¹²⁹ Another way to say this is that God existed (and ontologically still exists) in a “pre-creational timelessness.”¹³⁰ Pre-creation, God’s existence was not defined by time since time had not yet been created.¹³¹

In a very real sense, time does not apply to God.¹³² He is supratemporal—above time. Supratemporality means that God’s ontological existence stands above time

¹²⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 168.

¹²⁹Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 28; see also 137.

¹³⁰Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 228.

¹³¹Two schools of thought exist about the nature of time. The first posits time as a created reality that came into being at creation in Genesis (see Gen 1; 1 Tim 1:17; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 1:2; Jude 1:25). Therefore, a “pre-time” exists when time was not. Karl Barth represents this idea when he states, “We are not from eternity, and neither is our world. There was a time when we and the world did not exist. This was the ‘pre-time,’ the eternity of God. And in this time, before time, everything, including time itself, was decided and determined, everything that is in time” (Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:622). The alternate view sees time as an eternal reality. For more on the relationship of God and time, see Bruce Ware’s *God’s Greater Glory*, 133-39.

¹³²Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 84.

and outside of time. According to Aquinas, in the realm of supra-temporality, God experiences no chronological succession of moments.¹³³ His entire existence is simultaneous.¹³⁴ For God, everything that will happen has already happened.¹³⁵ Even after creation and the inauguration of time, God remains fundamentally and ontologically atemporal and supratemporal, yet is actively and influentially present within the space and the time-bound universe he created.¹³⁶

God's atemporality is a distinguishing feature that highlights God's separateness from all that is not God, from all that is created.¹³⁷ When speaking of God's atemporality, the Bible uses the word *eternity* or *eternal*. Eternity is an apophatic term expressing what God is not. Eternity is not an infinite extension of time backward combined with an infinite extension of time forward.¹³⁸ Rather, eternal means that God is not temporal.

To bring clarity to the concept of eternal, helpful comparisons can be made between God's timeless eternity and human temporality. For example, the eternity of God presupposes that, unlike all created reality (including time), God has no beginning. Neither will God ever have an end. God experiences no succession of moments but rather experiences all of pre-creational timelessness, all of human history in its totality,

¹³³A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1967), 1:276-77.

¹³⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium in Theology*, trans. Cyril Vollert (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1947), 13.

¹³⁵Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 39-40.

¹³⁶Erickson, *God the Father Almighty*, 139.

¹³⁷Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 229.

¹³⁸Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:608.

and all post-creational timelessness as an ever-present now.¹³⁹ In contrast, man experiences life chronologically. Though God thinks in logical progression, he experiences no chronological succession. Unlike man, God does not experience a before or an after.¹⁴⁰ God is timeless; finite creatures can never be timeless. They will always be bound to experience time as a succession of sequential moments, even in the new heaven and the new earth.¹⁴¹ Timelessness will forever be an exclusively transcendent divine attribute.

As atemporal and eternal, God sees all time with equal vividness. Peter writes these words in 2 Peter 3:8, “But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” This text highlights God’s perspective on time. Long periods of time to God seem as if they just happened, and a short period of time seems to last forever. Likewise, both long and short periods of time exist simultaneously as present consciousness.¹⁴²

God’s revealed name, Yahweh, represents the timeless quality of God. Yahweh simply means “I Am.” Expressed in present tense, the name Yahweh implies a life lived in an eternal present apart from the bounds of time, unlimited by the passing of time, and unable to be measured by time. God is simultaneous. God is infinite

¹³⁹Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:283.

¹⁴⁰Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:639; and Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 1:276-77.

¹⁴¹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 173. Grudem also writes that in the new heaven and new earth, “there will still be a succession of moments one after another and things happening one after another in heaven. We will experience eternal life not in an exact duplication of God’s attribute of eternity, but rather in a duration of time that will never end: we, as God’s people will experience fullness of joy in God’s presence for all eternity—not in the sense that we will no longer experience time, but in the sense that our lives with him will go on forever” (173).

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, 170.

duration.¹⁴³ God simply is. Louis Berkhof in his *Systematic Theology* comments on God's atemporality in this way: "His [God's] eternity may be defined as that perfection of God whereby He is elevated above all temporal limits and all succession of moments, and possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present."¹⁴⁴

Scripture is replete with references to God's eternity. Moses highlights God's timelessness when he writes in Deuteronomy 33:27, "The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms."¹⁴⁵ The prophet Isaiah proclaimed in Isaiah 57:15a that God is the "one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy." As the Alpha and Omega, God is without beginning, and he will have no end (Rev 1:8).

The everlasting God. When God created time, he graciously chose to interact with his creation in time. Though God, in and of himself, neither knows nor experiences time, when God created both time and space, he chose to fill all of time and all of space with himself.¹⁴⁶ In Jeremiah 23:24, the words of God himself declare, "Do I not fill heaven and earth?"

How does God choose to graciously take on time? In a similar way that God took on flesh in the incarnation without in any way diminishing his deity, God also adds to himself time without in any way diminishing his transcendent aspatiality or negating

¹⁴³Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:608.

¹⁴⁴Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: Banner of Truth, 1958), 60.

¹⁴⁵Deut 3:27 affirms both God's timeless eternity and his temporal everlastingness.

¹⁴⁶Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 28.

his atemporal timelessness.¹⁴⁷ In adding time to himself, God now acts in time if he so chooses because he is Lord over time.¹⁴⁸

When words that refer to time appear in Scripture, they are generally referring to human time, not to divine time.¹⁴⁹ According to Barth, Scripture has a distinct predilection to thinking of God not in his timeless eternity but in his everlastingness—a word that presupposes and encompasses duration and the passing of time.¹⁵⁰ Using post-creation language that conceives of time as a succession of moments, the Bible speaks of God as being everlasting and implies that his time is an unending reality that stretches infinitely forward and infinitely backward through both past and future.¹⁵¹ Isaiah 40:28 states, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.” In Genesis 21:33, “Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God,” and 1 Chronicles 16:36 attests that the LORD, the God of Israel, is “from everlasting to everlasting!” The psalm writer exclaims in Psalm 90:2, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

Though God chose to co-exist with the time he created and in the time he created, God’s experience of time is always qualitatively different from the way humans

¹⁴⁷Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 136-37.

¹⁴⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 172.

¹⁴⁹Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 39.

¹⁵⁰Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:610.

¹⁵¹Murphree, *Divine Paradoxes*, 15-16.

experience time.¹⁵² The effects of the passing of time have no impact on God. God never experiences the defects of human time. For example, the human “present” is inferior because it is always rapidly fleeting.¹⁵³ For God, time is never fleeting, and he lives perpetually in an eternal now. Human time experiences separations: then, now, before and after, yesterday and tomorrow.¹⁵⁴ God never experiences the separations of time or the adverse effects of passing time like aging, deterioration, or death.¹⁵⁵ God never gets old, tired, or weary.

In conclusion, God has a dualistic relationship to time. He is both atemporal and omnitemporal.¹⁵⁶ In the first sense, time does not apply to God. He was before time began, and he will continue to be when time ends.¹⁵⁷ Yet, God chose to create time. He then graciously chose to coexist with time and to interact with his creation in a timely way. At once God is both fully timelessly atemporal and transcendently nonspatial while being omnitemporally present and interactive with the world he created.¹⁵⁸ Stand in awe of the transcendent, timelessly eternal, everlasting God of wonder.

¹⁵²Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 170.

¹⁵³Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:617.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 612.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 617.

¹⁵⁶Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 226.

¹⁵⁷Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 84.

¹⁵⁸Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 136.

God's Transcendent Infinitude

God is transcendentally and gloriously infinite. *Infinite* uniquely expresses God's beyondness to and otherness than his creation. Infinite is a spectrum attribute of God that essentially means that he is not restricted in "space, duration, or quantity."¹⁵⁹ God is absolutely and eternally free from all creaturely limitations.¹⁶⁰ Not only is God unlimited, but also he is unlimitable.¹⁶¹ God is both boundless and unboundable. Though the Bible does not specifically use the term *infinite*, God's infinitude is expressed in words like *unsearchable* and *measureless*. The human mind struggles to grasp the infinite. In fact, the human mind will never fully grasp God's infinitude.¹⁶² Romans 11:33 makes this declaration of praise: "O, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Like the summative quality of holiness, the quality of infinity can be applied to all of God's attributes. Stand in awe of the transcendent God of wonder who is infinitely graceful, infinitely just, infinitely loving, infinitely knowledgeable, infinitely wise, and infinitely holy.

Conclusion and Summary

God begins his self-revelation to mankind by establishing this truth: God and humans are not alike. God is qualitatively different from humans and all created things.

¹⁵⁹*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.v. "Infinite."

¹⁶⁰Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 85.

¹⁶¹Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:465.

¹⁶²Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 44.

This fundamental difference of the divine from the mundane is captured in the word *transcendence*. God is transcendent. He is wholly other, he is beyond, he is other than. God is not continuous with the natural world. He is discontinuous. Geoffrey Wainwright in *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* makes this statement: “Nothing within creation can depict God in so far as he, the Creator, is transcendent over creation.”¹⁶³ God’s transcendence makes him ineffable and incomparable. He is both independent of creation and superior to it in every way.¹⁶⁴ God’s transcendence essentially means two things: God is above, and God is beyond. David Wells, distinguished professor of theology and noted author, remarks that Scripture declares that

God is exalted, that he is “high,” that he is “above.” They celebrate the fact that God in his being, character, and will is not subject to the ebb and flow of life, to its limitations and distortions, that such is the power God has that even in a fallen world he is able to effect his will, exercise his sovereign control, and act in the fabric of its life.¹⁶⁵

God is distinct from his creation. Creatures are weak, finite, physically bound, limited, and sinful. God, on the other hand, is infinite, limitless, invisible, eternal, and holy. God knows all and sees all. He possesses all knowledge and all power to do anything he wills to do. God is timelessly eternal and temporally everlasting. He is the Alpha and Omega—the one who has no beginning and will have no end. He is infinitely wise, infinitely holy, and infinitely powerful. He is inescapable, incomprehensible, and the unmoved mover. From him and through him and to him are all things. Nothing is

¹⁶³Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 33.

¹⁶⁴Erickson, *God the Father Almighty*, 256.

¹⁶⁵David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 122.

above God. Nothing is beyond God. Nothing is prior to God. Nothing is grander than God. God transcends our world, and God is so far above that the human mind will never be able to fully comprehend him. Theophilus of Antioch in the second century makes this observation:

The appearance of God is ineffable and indescribable, and cannot be seen by eyes of flesh. For in glory, He is incomprehensible, in greatness unfathomable, in height inconceivable, in power incomparable, in wisdom unrivalled, in goodness inimitable, in kindness unutterable. . . . He is without beginning, because He is unbegotten; and he is unchangeable because he is immortal.¹⁶⁶

For humanity, transcendence is the appropriate and essential beginning place for the proper understanding of God. God is above, and God is beyond. However, when examining God's transcendent attributes, care must be taken not to diminish or jeopardize God's immanence, nearness, care, or concern for his creation.¹⁶⁷ This gloriously unfathomable God chose to dwell with his creation in nearness rather than remain wholly remote. Though the Creator-creature distinction is first characterized by God's transcendent otherness from his creation, the Creator-creature distinction is secondly characterized by God's immanent nearness with his creation—the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁶⁶Theophilus of Antioch, "Theophilus To Autolytus," 1.3 and 1.4, reprinted in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur C. Coxe (New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), 89-90.

¹⁶⁷Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 36.

CHAPTER 5
BIBLICAL GROUNDING OF IMMANENCE
IN TRANSCENDENCE

As transcendence is a descriptive term used to characterize the Creator-creature distinction, so also *immanence* expresses an aspect of the Creator-creature relationship. Immanence refers to God's choice to be intimately involved in the world that he created. Though God in his intrinsic self-sufficiency could have remained apart from creation, in his great love and care, he chose to interact with creation rather than stand completely apart from it.¹

Creation marked the beginning of non-divine otherness.² All that is can be divided into two categories: (1) God and (2) all that is not God. All creation stands apart from the prime mover, from the one whom its entire existence finds its source. The act of creation grounds both God's transcendence and God's immanence.³ God in his transcendence is totally and completely separate from and other than his creation. Simultaneously, God in his immanence graciously dwells with his people. The imagery of the Old Testament tabernacle and temple was a vivid reminder to the children of Israel

¹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 267.

²John M Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 148.

³Rob Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 191.

that their God was one who was pleased to dwell with them. Yet, the temple veil separating the inner court from the Holy of Holies was a poignant reminder that God was utterly holy and wholly other than sinful humanity.

Though the Bible clearly defines holiness as a characteristic of divine transcendence, God's holiness is often recorded in tandem with a clear expression of his immanence. He is not simply the "Holy One." He is also described as the "Holy One of Israel" and the "Holy One in your midst" (Pss 71:22; 78:41; Isa 5:24; Hos 11:9). In his transcendent holiness, God chose to dwell in, with, and near his people. In the New Testament, Christ was a walking, breathing exclamation that God is pleased to abide with his people. Christ was Immanuel, the transcendent God who drew near to his creation. At the moment of crucifixion, the rent temple veil powerfully symbolized the reestablished access to God and the restored nearness to God that was inaugurated at Calvary and will ultimately be consummated upon Christ's return.

The story of God coming nearer, a rich and recurring scriptural theme, permeates the whole of the biblical narrative.⁴ From the moment of the great separation of man from God recorded in Genesis 3, the Bible chronicles the journey of God drawing near to his people again with the ultimate goal of being with his people for all eternity in heaven. In the end, God will be with his people. The spatial divide that separates God and man will be replaced with intimacy and nearness. As the psalmist reflected in Psalm 59:10a, "My God in his steadfast love will meet me."

⁴For a more comprehensive exploration of the story of God coming nearer, see J. Ryan Lister, *The Presence of God: Its Place in the Storyline of Scripture and the Story of Our Lives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

A. W. Argyle in *God in the New Testament* said, “The emphasis of the Bible falls upon God’s activity, God’s initiative, God’s approach to man preceding man’s approach to God. Both in the Old Testament story and in that of the New, he is an intensely personal God who visits His people and hears and answers their prayers.”⁵ God is always the initiator. God is the one who moves, comes, and acts in and with creation. As initiator, God, through a free act of grace, lowered himself from his place of exaltation and condescends to reveal his name, his character, his righteousness, his will, and his love to those who would have never known him apart from his self-disclosed revelation.⁶ God’s immanence is not a divine necessity.⁷ God could have decided never to create or, in creating, to stay totally veiled or aloof remaining detached and disconnected from the world he made. Yet, his choice to create was voluntary, and his decision to draw near to his creation was also voluntary—a free choice and a gracious act of an involved God. In God’s divine freedom, not divine necessity, he voluntarily created the world, and he willingly chose to remain involved in that creation.⁸ Nothing intrinsic to God’s nature or extrinsic to his person required him to reveal himself immanently. The decision to abide and dwell with creation was an uncoerced choice of the graciously transcendent, yet immanent God.⁹

⁵A. W. Argyle, *God in the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), 11.

⁶David Cairns, *God Up There? A Study in Divine Transcendence* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 10.

⁷Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 197; see also 282.

⁸*Ibid.*, 219.

⁹Donald G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 24.

As transcendence and immanence are considered, they must not be conceived of as mutually exclusive concepts, polar opposites, or inversely proportional attributes of God.¹⁰ They should not be defined simply in contrastive terms, though it may be helpful to think of the two terms paradoxically.¹¹ God is at once utterly transcendent and utterly immanent.¹² He is at once far and near. He is both altogether separated and infinitely close. God is higher than humanity but not limited from humanity.¹³ Paul captures the dual truths of God's otherness and his nearness in Ephesians 4:6 when Paul states that God is "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." He is distant, remote, and removed while simultaneously near, proximate, and connected. Though God is "supramundane," he is not "extramundane."¹⁴ In God's immanence, he is with and for his people.

Ultimately, Christ is the fullest manifestation of divine immanence.¹⁵ In Christ, God actively sought to restore man's broken relationship with himself. In Christ, God incarnated himself in the finite without in anyway ceasing to be infinite.¹⁶ In Christ, God ultimately and maximally demonstrated his desire to dwell with and redeem his

¹⁰Harm Goris, Herwi Rikhof, and Henk Schoot, eds., *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Work of Thomas Aquinas* (Walpole, MA: Peeters Leuven, 2009), viii.

¹¹William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 111.

¹²Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 24.

¹³*Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁴George Foot Moore, *Judaism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 423.

¹⁵Asher Finkel and Lawrence Frizzell, eds., *Standing Before God: Studies on Prayer in Scriptures and in Tradition With Essays in Honor of John M. Oesterreicher* (New York: KTAV Publishing, 1981), 23.

¹⁶Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 85.

people. In Christ, we see “the full impact of the revelation of God’s immanent self-relatedness. . . in light of humanity’s sinful rebellion against God and God’s indefatigable and self-sacrificing determination to restore and refashion that relationship to its intended fullness.”¹⁷

This chapter will examine God’s immanence, his glorious condescension, and his voluntary decision to dwell in and with his people. The wonder and significance of immanence is only correctly understood against the backdrop of properly understood and acknowledged transcendence.¹⁸ In the words of Donald Bloesch in *God the Almighty*, “God is never immanent without being essentially transcendent.”¹⁹ For this reason, I will interpret God’s immanence as an outflow and extension of his transcendent attributes examined in the previous chapter. The following five broad categories will be examined: (1) the transcendent holiness of God expressed immanently as judgment and wrath, (2) the transcendent Creator God expressed immanently as the God who sovereignly rules, (3) the transcendent Creator God expressed immanently as the God who graciously provides, (4) the transcendent aseity of God and inter-Trinitarian love expressed in immanent love, and (5) the transcendent freedoms of God and their implications and expressions in immanence.

¹⁷Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 52.

¹⁸Goris, Rikhof, and Schoot, *Divine Transcendence and Immanence*, x; and Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 36.

¹⁹Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 24.

The Transcendent Holiness of God Expressed Immanently as Judgment and Wrath

Holiness is the word the Bible uses to describe God's moral splendor, his absolute purity, and his utter separation from all that is sinful. The biblical metanarrative is predicated on the twin truths that God is holy and man is sinful. The immanent manifestation of the holiness of God is expressed throughout Scripture in terms of wrathful judgment of sin. God repeatedly expresses his disapproval with sin and calls mankind to repentance. Blessings await those who respond obediently to God while wrath and judgment are poured out on those who walk in sin and rebellion. Romans 1:18a states it this way, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

While many prefer to focus on the love of God, the painful truth is that God's transcendent holiness is expressed immanently in, near, and with his creation in the form of wrath. Since the fall of man in the Garden, the earth fights against men who sow and harvest. Women bear children in great pain. Sickness and disease plague humanity. Wars and rumors of wars are endless. Physical death is the ultimate end of all people, and eternal hell awaits those whose sin at death remains unforgiven.

In transcendent holiness, God is immanently present to humanity as the one who judges. Judgment is the necessary response of the absolute moral perfection of God toward unrighteousness. The manifestation of holiness is not optional for God. God cannot choose to express his holiness on one day and then choose not to express his holiness on another day. God's intrinsic moral perfection cannot be suppressed; therefore, judgment is a perpetual and necessary response of a holy God toward sinners. God sits as a righteous judge over his people and over those who reject him. King David wrote in

Psalm 7:11, “God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.”

Though God takes personal initiative in judgment, he is eager to defer or delay wrath in response to those who turn from their sin.²⁰

The theme of God’s immanent wrath is vividly depicted throughout both Old and New Testaments. God poignantly expresses this to Moses in Exodus 32:9-10a when he states, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.” The psalmist writes, “If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts” (Ps 7:12-13). The Apostle Peter records that “the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Pet 3:12). Paul warns that the impenitent hearts of men will experience the wrath and judgment of a righteous God (Rom 2:5). The prophet Isaiah describes the final judgment of God in Isaiah 66:15-17:

¹⁵For behold, the Lord will come in fire,
and his chariots like the whirlwind,
to render his anger in fury,
and his rebuke with flames of fire.
¹⁶For by fire will the Lord enter into judgment,
and by his sword, with all flesh;
and those slain by the Lord shall be many.

¹⁷Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig’s flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, declares the Lord.

The Apostle John records these thoughts about the final judgment of God in Revelation 20:11-15:

²⁰Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 465-66.

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Yet, for the child of God, God's eternal wrath and judgment are not something to be feared. Paul instructs the church at Ephesus that all Christians

³ . . . once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:3-7)

Though everlasting wrath and condemnation are not to be feared by Christians, the child of God will, however, experience the immanent punishment of God for sin in the form of discipline. No transgression ever goes unnoticed or unpunished. Believers will always reap corrective, sanctifying punishment for disobedience as God's holiness demands its just expression against sin and rebellion.

Before leaving the concept of God's transcendent holiness expressed in the form of wrath and judgment, I want to address one form of judgment that is specifically related to worship—God's punishment for idolatry.²¹ The consequences of idolatry are

²¹Ezekiel records these words of God recounting Israel's idolatry in Egypt: "On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob, making myself known to them in the land of Egypt; I swore to them, saying, I am the Lord your God. On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. And I said to them, Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. But

monumental. Idol worship elicits both the wrath of God and the judgment of God.²²

Tom Schreiner in his commentary on the book of Romans pens this observation:

Human unrighteousness most fundamentally consists in a refusal to worship God and a desire to worship that which is in the created order. Unrighteousness involves the refusal to give God his proper sovereignty in one's life. Since refusal to honor and glorify God is described in terms of unrighteousness, we have a clue here that both the saving and judging righteousness of God are rooted in a desire to see his name glorified. His wrath is inflicted upon the world because he is not prized, esteemed, and glorified.²³

People are shaped morally by the objects of their worship.²⁴ In an ironic twist, idols that are formed by human hands re-form the ones who made them. In essence, humans become like that which they worship, either for their ruin or for the restoration of the image of God they were created to reflect.²⁵ Being reconfigured into the image of an idol is detrimental to the creature that was made to image God. The judgment for idolatry is built into the fabric of worship. Those who choose to worship false, inanimate, spiritually lifeless idols become themselves spiritually dead. This concept is illustrated throughout the Old Testament and is captured in Psalm 135:15-18:

¹⁵The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.

¹⁶They have mouths, but do not speak;
they have eyes, but do not see;

they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt" (Ezek 20:5b-8).

²²G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 36.

²³T. R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 88.

²⁴Noel Due, *Created for Worship: From Genesis to Revelation to You* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 23.

²⁵Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 16.

¹⁷they have ears, but do not hear,
nor is there any breath in their mouths.
¹⁸*Those who make them become like them,
so do all who trust in them!* (emphasis mine)

In the passage above, the ruinous consequence of idolatry is that the worshiper of idols became like the idols he/she worshiped. In Psalm 135, the following pattern as a result of idolatry recurs repeatedly throughout Scripture: ears do not hear, eyes cannot see, and mouths cannot speak.²⁶ Idol worshipers have mouths but cannot speak truth. They have eyes but cannot spiritually see. They have ears but cannot hear the Lord. Idol worshipers become spiritually dead like the idols they have chased after.

In a similar passage after a stunning revelation of himself to Isaiah, God pronounces his immanent judgment on his wayward children:

⁹And he said, “Go, and say to this people:

“Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

¹⁰Make the heart of this people dull,
and their ears heavy,
and blind their eyes;

lest they see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed.”

¹¹Then I said, “How long, O Lord?”

And he said:

“Until cities lie waste without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is a desolate waste,

¹²and the LORD removes people far away,
and the forsaken places are
many in the midst of the land.” (Isa 6:9-12)

²⁶Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 44; see also Isa 42:17-20 and Ps 115:4-8.

This passage describes God’s punishment of Israel by means of their own sin. In essence, he is saying, “Since you chose to worship idols rather than me, your judgment is that you will become like the idols you worship and that likeness will utterly devastate you.”²⁷

God’s judgment for worshiping idols is forcing the idolater to resemble the idol. In Jeremiah 2:5, the prophet records a similar scenario: “Thus says the Lord: ‘What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, *and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?*’” (emphasis mine). Hosea 9:10-12 records this warning:

¹⁰Like grapes in the wilderness,
I found Israel.
Like the first fruit on the fig tree
in its first season,
I saw your fathers.
But they came to Baal-peor
And consecrated themselves to the thing of shame,
and became detestable like the thing they loved.
¹¹Ephraim’s glory shall fly away like a bird—
no birth, no pregnancy, no conception!
¹²Even if they bring up children,
I will bereave them till none is left.
Woe to them when I depart from them! (emphasis mine)

Perhaps the most shameful and blatant act of idolatry recorded in the Old Testament is found in Exodus 32. Israel had just been emancipated from Egyptian slavery. They had experienced God as both utterly powerful and intimately personal. Encamped at Sinai awaiting the return of Moses from receiving the terms of the new covenant, the following heinous example of idolatry occurred:

¹When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” ²So Aaron said to them,

²⁷Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 36-70.

“Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” ³So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” ⁵When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.” ⁶And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

⁷And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. ⁸They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” ⁹And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”

¹¹But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹²Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. ¹³Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’” ¹⁴And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

¹⁵Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides; on the front and on the back they were written. ¹⁶The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. ¹⁷When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “There is a noise of war in the camp.” ¹⁸But he said, “It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear.” (Exod 32:1-18)

Exodus forever records the blatant, rebellious idolatry of God’s beloved. The people of Israel were essentially making this request to Aaron: “Up! Make us a god that

will walk before us.”²⁸ With those words and subsequent actions, God’s chosen people corrupted themselves with a worship celebration surrounding a golden cow. Especially noteworthy is that the cow was a venerated animal in Egypt and Canaan, a further dishonoring of the Lord. Their desire was to worship a god that had a physical form just like the gods of other surrounding nations. In many ways, this rebellion and subsequent fall from fellowship with Yahweh harkened back to the first fall by Adam and Eve in the garden.²⁹ In both scenarios, God was tangibly present in their midst—Sinai and the Garden; yet, in both scenarios, disobedience was the end result.

The psalm writer in Psalm 106:19-22 expresses what happened at the encampment at Sinai in this way:

¹⁹They made a calf in Horeb
and worshiped a metal image.
²⁰*They exchanged* the glory of God
for the image of an ox that eats grass.
²¹They forgot God, their Savior,
who had done great things in Egypt,
²²wondrous works in the land of Ham,
and awesome deeds by the Red Sea. (emphasis mine)

Thus, the essence of idolatry is captured in the phrase “they exchanged.” Israel exchanged the worship of their glorious Lord for the worship of a lifeless, stiff-necked image made of metal. They once possessed his glory, reflected his glory, and represented his glory to the nations as they displayed being the result of his redemptive acts on their behalf.³⁰ Instead, they were destined to become like the god of their making, stiff-necked

²⁸Daniel L. Akin, *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 195.

²⁹Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2006), 118.

³⁰Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 87.

and spiritually dead—the righteous and just punishment of the God who is holy and demands to be worshiped exclusively.

God’s wrath is the perfectly formed response of an infinitely holy and sovereign God against human rebellion.³¹ It is an expression of God’s immanence and the necessary reaction of a holy God to sin.³² God is opposed to anything that is antithetical to his moral character. He intensely hates sin and his wrath burns hotly against his people when they rebel.³³ Stand in awe of the immanent expressions of judgment, wrath, and punishment for sin, which flow out of God’s transcendent holiness, righteousness, and sinless perfection.

The Transcendent Creator God Expressed Immanently as the God Who Sovereignly Rules

The immanent expressions of divine sovereignty over creation spring from God’s transcendent Creator-ness. God’s nearness is expressed in his meticulous oversight over the heavens and earth he made. As Creator, God could have chosen to be disengaged from his creation, to stand absolutely aloof, exercising no claims of authority and offering no ongoing provision for his people. However, God elected to engage his creation as the sovereign Lord—the King of creation who sits on a throne ruling and reigning over all that he spoke into being.

³¹Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 226.

³²Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 142.

³³Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 205-6.

God is universally and incontestably sovereign.³⁴ He regulates the affairs of men and is in ultimate control over the entire course of nature and human history.³⁵ Divine sovereignty means that God is directing all points of human history toward his desired ends. As Creator, God is entitled to rule over his creation.³⁶ God in his lordship sits enthroned above the earth and exercises his entitled right to rule within the creation that belongs to him because it came from him. In Scripture, God's throne symbolizes his authority and entitlement to govern his creation.³⁷ The psalmist declares in Psalm 47:8, "God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne." God's throne is an everlasting throne (Ps 45:6); his rule and reign are an eternal expression of his universal authority as Creator. In the words of Bruce Ware in *God's Greater Glory*, "To create is to own, to own is to possess inherent rights to rule, and to rule manifests God's absolute claims upon the whole of what he has made."³⁸

As a sovereign king, God's immanent rule and reign are exhaustive. Isaiah 45:5-7 highlights God's total control of all things bad and all things good:

⁵I am the Lord, and there is no other,
besides me there is no God;

³⁴Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 23.

³⁵Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 47. ". . . God rules over creation with sovereign authority and exhaustive, meticulous governance, regulating the affairs of men by granting them a freedom of inclination by which God's sovereign control and their genuine freedom are rendered fully compatible. And God rules through creation, controlling both good and evil, but in asymmetrical ways, often using his compatibilist middle knowledge to steer the course of history, yet never violating the integrity of the free choices of his moral creatures by which they choose and act according to their strongest inclinations" (Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 131).

³⁶Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 80.

³⁷David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 108.

³⁸Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 62.

I equip you, though you do not know me,
⁶that people may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is none besides me;
I am the Lord, and there is no other.
⁷I form light and create darkness,
I make well-being and create calamity,
I am the Lord, who does all these things.

This spectrum text, though counterintuitive to man's logic, teaches that all of God's providential actions are accomplishing his glorious purposes, even the events that seem "bad" from a human perspective. Deuteronomy 32:39 attests that God kills and makes alive. He wounds and heals. God does whatever he pleases (Ps 135:6). Ultimately, God has unlimited power to do "according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth" (Dan 4:35).

The Transcendent Creator God Expressed Immanently as the God Who Graciously Provides

As the transcendent Creator and ultimate source of all that has been made, God immanently provides for his creation. He is Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord who provides (Gen 22:14) and sustains. As the Creator who sustains, "he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:25b). Philippians 4:19 states that God supplies every need "according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Indeed, "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (Jas 1:17a).

As a sovereign ruler, God provides all that is necessary to support and care for his creation. He grants all things necessary for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). Paul writes in Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" Jesus taught his followers in Matthew 6:25-33 not to be anxious for life's essentials because God provides for those

who seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. King David writes of the greatness of God as provider when he states:

¹⁵The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
¹⁶You open your hand;
you satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Ps 145:15-16)

God's creation is utterly dependent upon him for sustenance and provision.

Job 12:10 records these words: "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind." Paul teaches in Colossians 1:17 that "all things are created and held together by God." Luke records Paul's address to the men of Athens at the Areopagus in Acts 17:24-28:

²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸for "In him we live and move and have our being."

In addition, the writer of Hebrews declares that God is constantly upholding the universe by the word of his power (Heb 1:3). Creation is dependent on God, and God graciously provides for and cares for that which he has made—not simply from afar but also from up close.

God's greatest provision for humanity was that of himself, especially the provision of himself for man's sin penalty. Just as God provided a substitute sacrifice for Isaac on Mount Moriah, God also provided a substitute sacrifice for the sins of man on Mount Calvary through Christ. This aspect of God as provider will be discussed later in

this chapter. Marvel at the transcendent Creator God who expresses himself immanently in and with his creation as sovereign ruler and gracious provider.

God's Transcendent Aseity and Inter-Trinitarian Love: Expressions in Immanent Love

The affection of God toward his people is an immanent outflow of God's transcendent self-sufficiency and eternal inter-Trinitarian love that exists among God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Pre-creation, this inter-Trinitarian love had been expressed throughout all of eternity past.³⁹ Post-creation, inter-Trinitarian love continues to be expressed throughout all of eternity present and future. A glimpse of this eternal love among the Godhead is recorded in Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17:24 when he prayed, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world."

God's love is pure and selfless, having everything to give and needing nothing in return.⁴⁰ Because God experiences a completely loving, satisfying relationship within the Trinity, he has no need or obligation to express love to humanity. Likewise, he never stands in need of the objects of his love; yet, he persistently pursues and loves those who bear his image.⁴¹

In his self-giving love, God's purpose was not to fill himself up with creation. Rather, God's purpose was to fill creation with himself. His own nature is love, so he

³⁹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 199.

⁴⁰C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 43.

⁴¹Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 56.

chose to make and love another. This is an amazing thought. God created people in his own image to be loved by him—not to receive from humans, but to give to humans. He is the wooer; we are the wooed. He is the initiator; we are the responders and receivers. He is the lover; the people of God are the beloved.

While being completely self-sufficient, God still desires the love of his creation and tirelessly pursues his beloved. In an amazing expression of gracious condescension, God has chosen to allow his heart to be passionately connected with humans. “Though God was absolutely free from obligation or necessity, he chose to allow his heart to be bound to the hearts of his people forever, even at unspeakable cost to himself.”⁴² God’s love is freely given to his children. They are the privileged repository and object of divine love. In the words of C. S. Lewis, God “has paid us the intolerable compliment of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense.”⁴³

Unlike God’s holiness that necessarily must be perpetually expressed, the expressions of the love of God extended toward mankind are not obligatory.⁴⁴ Though Scripture teaches that God intrinsically is love, he is not bound by his nature to express love outside of the Trinity. Yet, God chose to love the world because he wanted to love

⁴²A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), 100.

⁴³Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 33.

⁴⁴God is under no obligation to extend his love to anyone. The Bible teaches that God chooses to love some and not others. Malachi records these words of the Lord: “‘I have loved you,’ says the Lord. But you say, ‘How have you loved us?’ ‘Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ declares the Lord. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated’” (Mal 1:2-3a). Likewise, when God freed Israel from Egypt, he could have chosen a different way of rescue or even a different group of people to rescue. Instead, he decided to rescue Israel and punish/destroy the Egyptian army, even though both Israel and Egypt were sinners in God’s sight, and both were deserving of God’s wrath. Yet, God chose to save, bless, and love Israel and to punish/destroy Egypt. No moral disparity existed between Israel and Egypt; Israel deserved the same judgment as Egypt. However, God in his wisdom and for reasons not always known to man chooses to love and bless some, though all deserve his wrath and punishment.

the world. His immanent expressions of love are completely uncoerced and voluntary. This divine love for mankind is expressed immanently as fatherly benevolence, merciful graciousness, redemptive rescue, abiding presence, and jealousy for exclusive worship—topics I will now address.

God’s Transcendent Inter-Trinitarian Love Expressed Immanently as Benevolent Father

Scripture portrays God as a father, an immanent expression of God the Father’s transcendent self-relatedness and role within the Trinity. The fatherness of God is expressed in his love for his children, his care for his children, his provision for his children, and the discipline of his children. The fatherhood of God has always been a significant point of Christian doctrine.⁴⁵ God’s invitation to relationship with him is not simply as sovereign and vassal; rather, it is as father and son or father and daughter. God’s redemptive invitation is into an eternal family, to be adopted as children of the living God in which Christians get to enjoy the benefits of being part of God’s family forever. Romans 8:15 states, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” Galatians 4:6 echoes this truth in a similar way: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”

The love of God the Father is measureless and boundless. God’s fatherly love “has no bounds because it is not a thing but a facet of the essential nature of God. His love is something He is, and because He is infinite, that love can enfold the whole created

⁴⁵G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 2nd ed. (London: S.P.C.K., 1952), 41.

world in itself and have room for ten thousand times ten thousand worlds beside.”⁴⁶

Coupling divine love with the attributes of God’s immutability and God’s infinity, the result is an understanding that God’s love is an everlasting love that will never change.⁴⁷

In love, God delights in his beloved. He enjoys his creation. As a father, God offers his sons and daughters everything. Though we can do nothing for him, he freely chooses to do everything for his children.⁴⁸

Scripture frequently records Jesus praying to God as father. Jesus not only modeled praying to God as father but also instructed his disciples to do likewise (Matt 6:9). Jesus is teaching that the inter-Trinitarian love that he experiences with God the Father is something that adopted sons and daughters of God can experience immanently here on earth. The Apostle John expressed it this way, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1a). Marvel at the gloriously transcendent love of God expressed immanently as a father’s love for his children.

God’s Transcendent Inter-Trinitarian Love Expressed Immanently through Mercy and Grace

Another immanent outworking of the intrinsic inter-Trinitarian transcendent love is grace, mercy, and forgiveness for the elect. Mercy can be defined as “God’s favor

⁴⁶Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 47.

⁴⁷Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 242.

⁴⁸Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 56.

and compassion shown to those destitute, ruined, helpless, and hopeless due to sin.”⁴⁹

God’s grace can be characterized as his “favor and kindness to those fully undeserving of that favor.”⁵⁰ While neither mercy nor grace has expression within the Godhead since both are exclusively direct responses of God to sin, both are compassionate expressions of God’s love for a fallen humanity infected with sin.

Astonishingly, God’s love expressed through mercy and grace is conveyed lavishly on undeserving sinners. He created the world knowing that those he created would also reject him. He knew that he would not only be giving them life but also that he would be giving his own life coupled with the gift of faith to redeem those who in no way deserved redeeming. Paul writes of God’s gracious love to the Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8). John celebrates God’s merciful love for the fallen image-bearers of God when he writes, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” This ultimate expression of love’s mercy and grace was demonstrated through the atoning redemptive work of Christ on the cross of Calvary, an enormous subject to which we briefly turn next.

God’s Transcendent Inter-Trinitarian Love Expressed Immanently in Redemption

God so loved the world that he gave Christ to redeem and grant eternal life to those who would believe in him by grace through faith. The grand arc of the Bible’s

⁴⁹Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 153.

⁵⁰Ibid.

metanarrative soars on the wings of God's great expression of love for a fallen and broken world wrought by the obedience of Christ's death on a Roman cross.

Though God's universal love is extended to all, God's redeeming love is only extended to some. It is God's prerogative to whom his redeeming love will be extended. Redemptive love is a particular love for his own people that would bring about their everlasting joy. Redeeming love is a love that seeks the purification of its object—namely, the elect or the Bride of Christ. Redeeming love calls God's people to walk blamelessly before God and to be holy as he is holy. Redeeming love initiates a process of sanctification produced through the power of the enduring presence of God with man through the Holy Spirit. Yet, since the fall, man has found it impossible to reach God's standard of holiness. Therefore, God's redeeming love was preceded by a righteous God's just verdict of guilty stamped on the soul of every man. Redeeming love then forensically took man's just and deserved penalty for sin and placed it on Christ (2 Cor 5:21). Redeeming love exchanged the filthy, sin-soaked rags of humanity for the spotless righteousness of Christ.

Paul explains to the Galatians that Christ died “to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:5). John writes of the Father's redemptive love in 1 John 4:10: “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Perhaps the cross is the greatest immanent expression of God's holiness and God's love combined. On the cross, God reveals his utter hatred of sin while simultaneously revealing the extent to which his love was willing to go to redeem a lost, sinful, and helpless race. Transcendent divine love lavishly expresses itself in immanent redemptive love. “For while we were

still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:6-8). Marvel at the transcendently magnificent, inter-Trinitarian love of God expressed immanently through grace, mercy, and redemption.

God’s Transcendent Inter-Trinitarian Love Expressed Immanently through Abiding Covenant Presence

The entirety of the Bible is the story of God coming nearer. From Genesis 3 forward, Scripture records the transcendent, holy, infinite Creator of the universe coming nearer to his sin-wrecked creation—a coming near that is both personal and present. After the Fall, Adam and Eve were driven out of God’s presence, distanced from him by unholiness and rebellion. Yet, as the biblical narrative continues forward from Genesis, God is revealed as the one who provides means by which broken humanity may come nearer again.

How is it possible for transcendent holiness to be near human brokenness? God’s immanent nearness is established with his people, according to Scripture, through a covenantal relationship. God voluntarily commits and pledges himself to his people to be directly involved in their lives, to be in covenant relationship personally. These words of the Lord recorded in Isaiah 43:1-5a declare God’s uncoerced desire to be with his people:

¹But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.

²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.

³For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I give Egypt as your ransom,
Cush and Seba in exchange for you.

⁴Because you are precious in my eyes,
and honored, and I love you,
I give men in return for you,
peoples in exchange for your life.

⁵Fear not, for I am with you.”

God committed himself, willingly and knowingly, to that which would utterly reject him, and he made those who would reject him to be the chosen objects of his divine care and concern.⁵¹ Through God’s covenant agreement, God promised his abiding presence with his people. This kind of presence is different from God’s mere omnipresence and is indeed a commitment to be with his people in a special, personal way.

Covenants are essentially “unchangeable, divinely imposed legal agreements between God and man that stipulate the conditions of their relationship.”⁵² Covenants are non-negotiable and cannot be changed by man.⁵³ In the words of Michael Horton in *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology*, God is “bound to us (better, has bound himself to us) by a free decision to enter into covenant with us and with the whole of creation. God

⁵¹Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 55-56.

⁵²Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 515.

⁵³Ibid.

is not free to act contrary to such covenantal guarantees because doing so would entail the violation not only of his decision but of his nature, particularly his faithfulness.”⁵⁴

Covenants between God and man appear throughout the Bible.⁵⁵ Each carries this essential promise: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”⁵⁶ God promises an everlasting, intimate, familial relationship with his people. Through covenant—both old and new—Scripture demonstrates a movement of God back toward creation, a reestablishing of intimacy that was lost in Genesis 3. It is important to note

⁵⁴Michael S. Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 33.

⁵⁵The following is a summary of the six major covenants outlined in Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum’s *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). (1) Covenant with Creation (Gen 1-3). The covenant with creation, sometimes called “covenant of works,” was made with the first Adam as the federal head of the human race and promised eternal life to Adam and his offspring contingent on perfect obedience to God’s commands. After the fall, a saving “covenant of grace” was offered to the elect where life and salvation are offered to sinners through the last Adam, Christ. (2) Covenant with Noah (Gen 6:8, 18; 9:9-17). The covenant with Noah restates God’s commitment to preserve, care for, and rule over that which he has created. This covenant firmly declares that creation, and humanity in particular, will never be totally annihilated again and will not finally fail. Instead, sin’s curse will one day be eradicated and a new/renewed creation established. (3) Covenant with Abraham (Gen 12; 15; 17; 22). The Abrahamic covenant clarifies the way in which God will fulfill for humanity the blessing promised to Noah for all flesh and bring about the promise of Genesis 3:15—a new creation. How will this blessing come? God’s blessing of reconciliation and healing of all nations would come through Abraham and his descendants (Gen 15; 17:2; Jer 34:18-20). (4) Covenant with Israel (the Mosaic Covenant, sometimes called the “old covenant”). The covenant with Israel is a part of God’s faithfulness in fulfilling his covenant with Abraham. Moses is called by God to deliver his people from Egyptian bondage (Exod 3:6; cf. 2:24-25; Deut 4:36-38; 1 Chr 16:15-19; 2 Kgs 13:22-23). God has chosen Israel to be the special recipient of his love and favor because of his covenant loyalty to the promises made to Abraham (Deut 7:8). The Mosaic covenant was established by God as a bilateral agreement. Obedience to God’s commands would ensure blessing while disobedience would evoke God’s discipline (curses). (5) Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7; 1 Chr 17; cf. Pss 89; 110; 132). The Davidic Covenant has two main parts: (a) the promises of God to establish David and the lineage of David forever (2 Sam 7:12-13, 16; 1 Chr 17:11-12, 14; Pss 132:11; 89:1-3, 14, 24, 28, 33, 35) and (b) the promise of God to be in intimate relationship with David’s descendent, a “son” (1 Chr 17:13; 2 Sam 7:14; Pss 89:26-27; 2). The Davidic covenant is crucial to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. The ultimate fulfillment of both Abrahamic and Davidic covenants is the blessing of a “promised land,” indeed a new creation, that will be sovereignly ruled by the seed of David, Christ. (6) The New or Everlasting Covenant (Jer 31:31-34; cf. Heb 8; 10; Ezek 34; 36-37; Isa 40-66). In the New Covenant, God himself provides the solution for humanity’s corruption and sin penalty through the provision of a mediator, priest, and king, the Lord Jesus Christ. Forgiveness and intimate relationship with God are promised to all who are benefactors of the new covenant.

⁵⁶Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 515.

that God was not obligated to make any covenant with man. The covenant was an expression of God's fatherly, merciful, gracious, and redemptive love for his creation—namely his people.⁵⁷

Through covenants, God expressed a system of expectations and promises. Blessings are promised for obedience to God's behavioral expectations, and curses are assured for disobedience to God's expectations.⁵⁸ Covenants in the Old Testament were predicated on the obedience and faithfulness of God's people, a stipulation and expectation that were never actually met—hence the endless cycle of rebellion, repentance, and restoration for the people of God. God foreshadows the coming of a new covenant when he spoke these words through the prophet Jeremiah recorded in 31:31-34:

³¹Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³²not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

And again in Ezekiel 36:24-28:

²⁴I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. ²⁶And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my

⁵⁷Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 517.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 515.

people, and I will be your God.

This new covenant would not be based on the work of man but ultimately would be grounded in the work of Christ, activated by faith in the work of Christ, and made possible through the indwelling presence of God himself. This new covenant carried with it the promise of the blessing of being everlastingly present with God—a return to uninterrupted fellowship and intimacy that was lost in the Garden of Eden. Through the work of Christ, God promised to again make his dwelling among people, to walk among them, to be their God, and they his people (2 Cor 6:16b).

The new covenant is an absolute work of God's grace based totally on God's unmerited favor. The new covenant, sealed by the blood of Christ and ensured by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer, will have its supreme fulfillment in those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ being forever reunited with the Lord. Revelation 21:3 highlights this ultimate heavenly fulfillment, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.'" Marvel at the stunning, transcendent, inter-Trinitarian love of God expressed immanently through his abiding covenant presence that never leaves nor forsakes.

**God's Transcendent Inter-Trinitarian
Love Expressed Immanently
through Jealousy**

Earlier, I discussed God's immanent expression of wrath and judgment on idolatry as an outflow of his transcendent holiness. Now, I will examine a similar sentiment that is an outflow of God's transcendent, inter-Trinitarian love expressed immanently as jealousy.

God is jealous for the affection, allegiance, and worship of his people. His desire is to be the supreme object of their affections. God's declaration of his own exclusivity to the nation of Israel is emblazoned in the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:3 records the first commandment of the law: "You shall have no other gods before me." Neither were the people of God to take any other gods nor make any other gods to worship. Why? The Lord describes his motivation in the second part of Exodus 20:4: "for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." For the children of Israel, God commanded that they have no other gods before him. He was to be their one and only God. God's jealousy is rooted in his love, and he is willing to settle for no less than the exclusivity of Israel's affection, Israel's loyalty, and Israel's worship. Divine jealousy is holy and perfect and quite different from sinful human envy. Divine jealousy is a function of the immanent expression of God's infinite love for his people combined with his ardent commitment to protect his own name and glory. Hence, it is not wrong for God to desire his own honor, for he alone is singularly worthy of honor and glory.

As a jealous God, he sometimes pictures himself not as a father but as a husband and, at times, a jealous husband angered by a whoring bride who seeks after other gods. In this way, jealousy is not a negative and quite different from envy. Jealousy is the proper attitude of a man toward his wife (Prov 6:34). God's relationship with his people is profoundly analogous to the covenant relationship established by a man and his wife in marriage. As in the exclusivity of marriage, God demands exclusivity in

worship, allegiance, devotion, and obedience.⁵⁹ He has exclusive love for his people and demands the same in return. When his people violate his demand for exclusive love, he behaves like a godly husband; he becomes jealous. Note these words of the Lord recorded in Jeremiah 3:6, “Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore?” Additional whoring imagery found in the Old Testament book of Hosea represents God’s jealous love and exclusivity claims on his bride. As an unfaithful wife, Israel continually spurned God’s gracious love by prostituting their affections to worthless idols as they followed other gods. Yet, Hosea shows God’s compassion on his wayward wife recorded in Hosea 2:14-23:

¹⁴Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.

¹⁵And there I will give her her vineyards
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

¹⁶And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me “My Husband,” and no longer will you call me “My Baal.” ¹⁷For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. ¹⁸And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. ¹⁹And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. ²⁰I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.

²¹And in that day I will answer, declares the Lord,
I will answer the heavens,
and they shall answer the earth,
²²and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,

⁵⁹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 348.

and they shall answer Jezreel,
²³and I will sow her for myself in the land.
And I will have mercy on No Mercy,
and I will say to Not My People, “You are my people”;
and he shall say, “You are my God.”

Marvel at the transcendent, stunning inter-Trinitarian love of God expressed immanently through jealousy and the demand for exclusivity in relationship with his people.

Summary of Immanent Expressions of God’s Transcendent Inter- Trinitarian Love

God exists intrinsically and transcendentally in social community and unending love expressed eternally among the members of the Godhead. God did not need to love another. He was (and is) completely satisfied within the perfectly expressed and experienced love among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Though he did not need to love another, he chose to create people in his image and lavishly pour out his love upon them. This divine love takes the form of fatherly benevolence, merciful grace, rescue and redemption, and covenantal presence. This divine love is a jealous love. God demands to be supremely valued by his people and the exclusive object of the worship of his people.

The immanent love of God for his people flowing from the endless wellspring of transcendent, inter-Trinitarian love is high and wide and long and deep (Eph 3:18). It is beyond human comprehension. Volumes have been written about the love of God, and countless songs have been composed about the love of God. Man continually stands in awe of God’s unconditional, self-sacrificial love extended to an undeserving, rebellious mankind. Perhaps Meir Ben Isaac Nehorai captures the exasperation of trying to apprehend this kind of love in the last stanza of “The Love of God,” which reads:

Could we with ink the ocean fill
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill
And ev'ry man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Tho' stretched from sky to sky.⁶⁰

The chorus goes on to exclaim, “O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure—The saints’ and angels’ song!”⁶¹ Marvel at the transcendent divine love that God freely chose to lavishly pour out upon his people.

The Transcendent Freedoms of God: Implications and Expressions of Immanence

As discussed in the previous chapter, the transcendent freedoms of God are expressions of God’s unlimited ability to do as he pleases, anytime he pleases, for all eternity. In his freedom, God is completely independent from all things created. In freedom, God never changes. No outside will or force can ever change God’s essential character, nature, or decreed word. His knowledge is meticulously complete. He is wholly unrestrained in every way. The universe he created cannot hold him. Neither space nor time can contain him, though he freely exists in all places and in all times.

In God’s transcendent and complete self-determination, immanent expressions of his freedom abound. God’s transcendent constancy, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and timeless eternity are expressed immanently through divine

⁶⁰Meir Ben Isaac Nehorai, “The Love of God,” v. 3, in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 111.

⁶¹Verses 1, 2, and the chorus of “The Love of God” were written by Frederick M. Lehman.

faithfulness, providential control, personal knowledge and wisdom, nearness, and invitation into eternity with him.

God's Transcendent Constancy Expressed Immanently

God's constancy, another name for immutability, means that God's essence and character never change. God's transcendent constancy is expressed immanently within his creation in the form of absolute faithfulness to his word. He is trustworthy. His steadfast word, once it has been uttered, is unchanging and can be depended upon one hundred percent of the time throughout all generations (Ps 33:11). Even when people are faithless, God remains faithful to his word and his character (2 Tim 2:13). Fortunately, for redeemed sinners, the inalterability of God's word ensures that the requirements for salvation never change. Salvation will forever be by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone because God has declared it to be so (Eph 2:8).

Because God's words are true, reliable, and unalterable, Christians can rest in the promises of his word that were true yesterday, are true today, and will be true again tomorrow. Like his love, His faithfulness is great (Lam 3:23) and reaches to the heavens (Ps 36:5). One day in the future, God's promise of redemption will be eternally consummated when Christ comes again to receive his bride, and believers forever will be with the Lord (John 14:3; 1 Thess 4:17). God's unwavering faithfulness guarantees the efficacy of his covenants and ensures the reliability of his promises. Believers' peace concerning their eternal security in Christ is based solely on the steadfast, unchanging

faithfulness of God to honor the declarations of his word, to never change in his essence, and to be unchanging in his character.⁶²

Though God remains unchangeable in his essence, character, and decrees, God does change in his disposition, relation, and attitude toward his creation, namely, toward human beings.⁶³ God's emotional interactions with his creation are indeed variable. The term used for this characteristic of God is *relational mutability* and refers to God's chosen path of variability and adaptability vis-à-vis people. Barth uses the terms *mobility* and *elasticity* to describe this particular characteristic of God's emotional divinity.⁶⁴ God has designed and ordained that people can affect him. Though God possesses no void or lack of any kind, nevertheless, he has ordained that people can be a joyful blessing or a source of aggravation to him. According to Scripture, God can at times be grieved (Ps 78:40). At other times, God rejoices (Isa 62:5). God's anger can burn hot against injustice or against his enemies (Exod 32:10). God pities his children (Ps 103:13) and loves with everlasting love (Isa 54:8; Ps 103:17).⁶⁵ God can be jealous (Exod 20:5) and compassionate (Ps 103:8). God can be full of love (Jer 31:3), or God can choose to hate (Mal 1:3, Ps 11:5).

Though God is independent of people, people affect him. God's emotions are connected to his intimate and immanent personal relatedness to his people as their

⁶²Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 81.

⁶³Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 28.

⁶⁴Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 94.

⁶⁵Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 166.

sustainer, guardian, provider, counselor, commander, ruler, Lord, and lover. In the words of Bruce Ware,

. . . he has chosen, in all of these ways of relating, to do so as “with us” in personal relationship. He hears our cries and responds. He understands our weaknesses and sympathizes. He witnesses our defiance, and he frowns. He scorns our ultimate treason, and he judges. He sees our folly, and he grieves. He comprehends our hopelessness, and he saves. Therefore, while God’s effect on us is maximal, God has so designed that we also affect him. In a manner not unlike what happens if you choose to get to know someone very lonely and needy, the choice to pursue this relationship will mean, inevitably, that he will have an effect on you even though you hope to have a significant positive effect on him. God’s choice to relate to creation by establishing lines of personal, even intimate, relationship, requires that we see God as affected by us while supremely he makes the major effect upon us.⁶⁶

Both the idea of divine invulnerability and the idea of divine emotion run concurrently throughout the Bible.⁶⁷ In essence, God is responsive to his creatures both relationally as well as emotionally. Relationally, God stands as judge and one who damns those who perish apart from faith and trust in Christ. However, when a sinner turns to God through faith in Christ’s finished work of redemption on the cross, God’s relationship with that person changes from that of a condemning judge to a saving, loving Father.

As people respond positively or negatively to God’s gracious initiatives, God changes emotionally to correspond to their obedience or disobedience. God’s pleasure and joy or anger and wrath are exhibited appropriately in response to his people.⁶⁸ Yet, God is never gripped by passion so as to express an emotion involuntarily. Though God

⁶⁶Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 149.

⁶⁷Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 22; see also chap. 8.

⁶⁸Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 95.

responds to his creation, he is in no way passive.⁶⁹ God is never caught off guard by his emotions nor is he ever overwhelmed by his emotion.⁷⁰ God's emotions never control him; rather, God is always in perfect control of his emotions. He never experiences an involuntary reaction brought about by the actions of people. God's emotions can only be activated, elicited, or stirred with his permission. Creatures can never manipulate God's emotions. God's emotions are never outside of his dominion.⁷¹ His emotions do not manipulate his plans or overwhelm his thinking.⁷² God's emotions recorded in Scripture that imply ignorance (e.g., "regret" in Gen 6:6; 1 Sam 15:11) cannot be applied literally to God since a literal mundane application is incompatible with God's omniscience. Humans will never know what it is like to possess emotions as one who is infinite, eternal, omniscient, and sovereign.⁷³ In *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, D. A. Carson instructs:

God's "passions," unlike ours, do not flare up out of control. Our passions change our direction and priorities, domesticating our will, controlling our misery and our happiness, surprising and destroying or establishing our commitments. But God's "passions" like everything else in God, are displayed in conjunction with the fullness of all his other perfections.⁷⁴

Rob Lister in his *Impassible and Impassioned* draws this poignant conclusion about God's changing emotions: "While God is sinlessly, passionately, and voluntarily

⁶⁹Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 254-55.

⁷⁰Ibid., 74.

⁷¹Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 150; see also 194.

⁷²Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 6.

⁷³Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 160; see also 219.

⁷⁴D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 60-61.

responsive in the economy of redemption, he is never ultimately passive, in the sense of being involuntarily forced into an emotional experience that he does not intend to have. To state it differently, God is impassible and impassioned.⁷⁵ Marvel at the immanent, changeable emotions of God grounded in his transcendent, immutable essence and character. Marvel at the immanent faithfulness of God grounded in his transcendent constancy. “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lam 3:22-23).

God’s Transcendent Omnipotence Expressed Immanently in Providence

The transcendent omnipotence of God means that God has unlimited power and ability to do anything he wishes and all that he promises. Jeremiah muses over the limitless power of God when he says, “Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you” (Jer 32:17). God has the power to do anything he pleases. God can do anything he wills.⁷⁶ He is mighty in battle (Ps 24:8). He has the power to give life and to take life (Job 1:21). God is mighty to save sinners from ruin. In the face of every challenge, “the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear” (Isa 59:1).

God’s unlimited power is displayed immanently in humanity through his ultimate control of the totality of human history. This providential control directs all

⁷⁵Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 216.

⁷⁶Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God*, pt. 1, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 522.

things and all events to fulfill his good and wise purposes.⁷⁷ Believers can be encouraged that, in God, there is no such thing as a random event or accident (Prov 16:33). Because God is providentially and powerfully at work in human history, Christians can be thankful to God for every good thing that happens and trustful of the Lord for every seemingly bad thing that happens. For those who know and love God, God's power is working all things—both good and bad—together for good (Rom 8:28).⁷⁸

In addition, he is an all-powerful God of rescue and deliverance. He alone can set free those who are captive to sin and are under sin's curse (Isa 61:1; Luke 4:18). When God says that he will save those who repent and believe, he saves to the uttermost. Nothing can come against the all-powerful decree of God's salvific word. Hebrews 7:25 affirms this truth with these words, "he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." Through the power of God's decree made possible by the blood of Christ, anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom 10:13)! Nothing or no power can ever stand against God (2 Chr 20:6). No power can remove the redeemed from the protective hand of God (John 10:28-29). God is able to save and to sanctify. He will do it (1 Thess 5:24)! Marvel at the transcendent, infinite, unlimited power of God expressed

⁷⁷Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 315.

⁷⁸Addressing the questions "why does evil exist" and "how can an all-good God allow evil to exist in the world" is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, I must minimally point out that Scripture fully affirms God's providential control of both good and evil, though God is in no way evil or is he ever culpable for the freely chosen evil actions of sinful humanity. Isaiah 45:7 states these words of the Lord: "I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things." This passage along with others establish the exhaustive and meticulous sovereign providence of God over good and evil (see Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6-7; Eccl 7:13-14; Lam 3:37-38). For a deeper study of divine providence, see Bruce Ware's *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith*.

immanently through his providential control over the affairs of men. Stand amazed at his limitless annihilating power over sin, sorrow, death, and the grave (Hos 13:14; 1 Cor 15:54-56).

God's Transcendent Omniscience Expressed Immanently in Personal Knowledge and Wisdom

God's transcendent, exhaustive knowledge makes him intimately aware of every detail of every person's life. Matthew 10:29-31 records Jesus' words about God's compassionate knowledge: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

God exhaustively knows all things actual and all things possible—past, present, and future. Though God is separate from his creation, he is not a God who is so far beyond that he is disconnected from knowledge of his creation (Acts 17:27). God's awareness of every detail of human life is meticulous and exhaustive. God's omniscience means that God never forgets us and that God can never forget us.⁷⁹ Because God has complete knowledge and awareness of us, it is an accurate deduction to say that, in one sense, people are always on God's mind and always a part of his consciousness. God never forgets individuals. God's knowledge of humanity is more than a cold, theoretic knowledge. God's knowledge of people is a personal and intimate knowledge that is compassionate and caring.⁸⁰

⁷⁹Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:552.

⁸⁰Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 57.

God knew us before we ever knew him. The Bible says that God fully knew each person before the foundations of the world (Jer 1:5; Eph 1:4). This means that in eternity past, God knew us completely and decided to call the elect to himself despite his complete foreknowledge of mistakes, sin, and rebellion.⁸¹ God knows every single sin ever to be committed. Nothing is hidden from God. He knows the concealed thoughts of every human. He knows every act committed in secret. He knows every mistake that will ever be made. He knows every misspoken word, every harsh statement, and every spoken lie. He knows every missed or squandered opportunity. He knows every dark thought or evil deed.⁸² God knows all about us; yet, he still loves us. And from eternity past even with the complete knowledge of human sin and rebellions, he decided to save sinners.

God's knowledge and God's willing are interconnected as one. Therefore, God never wills anything without an exhaustive knowledge of the personal state, challenges, or prayers of his people. All of God's decisions are made with an intimate knowledge of us, our needs, and our challenges.⁸³ With exhaustive knowledge, God always chooses the very best goals and initiates the very best means to accomplish those goals—a characteristic of God sometimes called *omnisapience*, a term used to describe God's immeasurable wisdom.⁸⁴

⁸¹Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 57.

⁸²Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:553.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 552.

⁸⁴Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 193.

God is infinitely wise. His wisdom is not the product of age, study, or learning from mistakes, but an essential part of his transcendent divine character.⁸⁵ Because God is infinitely wise, he never seeks counsel for the decisions he makes concerning people. God's intrinsic and infinite treasury of wisdom flowing from his exhaustive knowledge means that his plans and his will can be trusted. God always employs the best means to reach God's best goals for us and for his creation. It is understandable that Paul in his first letter to Timothy broke out into this doxological expression, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, *the only wise God*, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim 1:17 KJV). Marvel at the transcendent omniscience of God expressed immanently in his complete personal knowledge of people and his wise providential control of their lives.

God's Transcendent Omnipresence Expressed Immanently in Nearness

God's transcendent omnipresence is expressed immanently through his abiding presence with his creation. God's immanence in and with his creation was not a necessary part of God's nature but a conscious choice of God to create and then to fill all that he created with himself.

God is everywhere in the universe he created. God's divine presence pervades and sustains the universe.⁸⁶ Paul instructed the church at Colossae with these words: "And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:17). Coupled

⁸⁵Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1:510.

⁸⁶Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 34.

with eternity, God's omnipresence means that he is in all places at all times to rule and superintend his creation.⁸⁷ God promises that he will never leave or forsake his children (Deut 31:6; Heb 13:5). He is ever-present in times of trouble. He is near to the broken-hearted.

Ultimately, the *Logos*, the living Word came to dwell among us (John 1:14) through the incarnation of Christ, Immanuel—God with us. Christ's last words were a promise to his people, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). In addition, Christ promised that upon his return to the Father, he would send another, the Holy Spirit, to now dwell within every believer. John records these words of Jesus in John 14:16-18: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." More about Christ's expression of God's nearness (and farness) will be addressed in the subsequent chapter.

The transcendent-immanent characteristics of God's omnipresence create an array of fascinating paradoxes. God is present with his creation while simultaneously being separate from his creation. In the words of C. S. Lewis, "God is both further from us, and nearer to us, than any other being."⁸⁸ God is at once far and near, proximal and remote. God is immanent eminence.⁸⁹ God is near everything, but God is not

⁸⁷Cairns, *God Up There?*, 29.

⁸⁸Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 33.

⁸⁹Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 101.

everything.⁹⁰ God is intrinsically nonspatial, yet he is omnipresent to his creation, with his creation, and in his creation.⁹¹ Though God is ontologically distinct from time and space, he is influentially present in human time and space.⁹² Hildebert of Lavardin, eleventh century Archbishop of Tours, summarized well the paradoxical nature of God's omnipresence when he said, "God is over all things, under all things; outside all; within but not enclosed; without but not excluded; above but not raised up; below, but not depressed; wholly above, presiding; wholly beneath, sustaining; wholly within, filling."⁹³

As God extends his transcendent omnipresence in immanent and personal nearness to all people everywhere, Christians can take comfort that God has the ability to hear all prayers offered to him from all places at all times. Barth makes this poignant observation in his *Church Dogmatics*:

Man is not merely permitted to hear God, to answer him, to worship him, and in that worship to find comfort, peace, and purity, but he may actually call upon God in the most definite way to do for him and give him what he needs, with the expectation that God will do it, and in his wisdom give him what he needs. So real is this communication that where it occurs, God positively wills that man should call upon him in this way in order that he may be his God and helper.⁹⁴

God is inescapable. Believers do not possess the power to separate themselves from God or escape his presence. Lister writes:

⁹⁰Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 74.

⁹¹Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 135.

⁹²Millard J. Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 271.

⁹³Hildebert of Lavardin, "Epistles," in *A New Dictionary of Quotations on Historical Principles from Ancient and Modern Sources*, ed. H. L. Mencken (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), 462-63.

⁹⁴Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:520.

Though God is present (indeed omnipresent) with his creation, this does not diminish the fact that, in himself and apart from creation, God transcends spatial existence and limitation. His intrinsic spacelessness, therefore, does not preclude his acting within space. It is not within the purview of creation to lock its creator—who transcends space in himself—out of creation.⁹⁵

There is no deep valley or dark night that can evade God’s penetrating presence. God’s omnipresence pierces the hidden places of every man’s heart and mind. Nothing is hidden from God. Neither man’s sin nor his struggles can be concealed from God. Fleeing from God’s presence or escaping the reach of God’s mighty hand—or grace—is a human impossibility (Ps 139:7-8).

God’s abiding presence means that Christians are never alone nor can they ever be alone. Christians are surrounded by God and indwelled by his Spirit. Ultimately, God’s presence will be manifested in a special way in Heaven, the ultimate destination of every believer where they will dwell in the presence of the Lord forever. Revelation 21:3 records this statement about heaven: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’” Marvel at the transcendent God of the universe who voluntarily chose to be immanently present to his creation and intimately near and with his people.

God’s Transcendent, Timeless Eternality Extended Immanently

God—the transcendent, timelessly eternal one—expresses his immanence in his nonobligatory decision to inhabit not only the creature’s space but also the creature’s

⁹⁵Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 227.

time.⁹⁶ God, the omnipresent and boundless one, freely chose to create space and time, and then he freely chose to inhabit all of space with all of himself (omnipresence). Simultaneously, God, the timelessly eternal one, chose to inhabit all creaturely time with himself.⁹⁷ God is omnitemporal; he is present at every point in human history while simultaneously and intrinsically existing outside of time itself. God's relationship to time is both transcendent and immanent.⁹⁸

Human time. As the one who is transcendentally eternal, God is immanently present with believers at every moment of their human timeline. Though God exists outside of human history, he interacts with humans within their history. "As the eternal One, it is he who surrounds our time and rules it with all that it contains."⁹⁹ God is personally present and participates with humanity at every moment of time (a combination of his omnipresence and his eternity).¹⁰⁰ He is not aloof from human history but highly involved in every detail.

The strongest example of God's involvement in human time is seen in the "redemptive-historical progression of God's eternal time."¹⁰¹ God reveals himself to humanity progressively over the course of time. God's redemptive work has a human chronological dimension that encompasses a succession of moments and events ordered

⁹⁶Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 191n.

⁹⁷Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 136-37.

⁹⁸Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 97.

⁹⁹Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:613.

¹⁰⁰Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 229.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 230.

in and through time. In the fullness of time, God's plans and purposes are revealed to reunite an estranged creation with its Creator (Eph 1:9-11). At just the right time, God sent Christ to be born of Mary, to live a sinless life, to be crucified on a cross, and to rise from the dead so that those condemned under the law might be rescued and adopted as sons and daughters of God (Gal 4:4-5). Though God is atemporal, he has freely chosen to manifest his presence at every point of human time.

God's time. In transcendent contrast to humans, God is timelessly eternal. He has no beginning and no end. In his infinitude, he is bound by neither time nor space. He exists outside of time, above time, and apart from time. In a breathtakingly marvelous act of his will, God invites people to join him in his eternity (present and future). He did not have to do this. God's invitation to man to partake of eternal life through Christ was an act of love and an extension of his mercy. In fellowship with God, the creature is allowed to taste eternity, an eternity that consists of ceaseless, uninterrupted, reconciled fellowship with the Creator. It was an act of God's love that he would exalt anything else to share in His eternity.¹⁰² God was under no obligation to invite Christians into fellowship with him eternally. God just as easily could have allowed man to perish in his finitude and sinfulness. Instead, God provided a way for man through Christ to possess God's own life and share in his eternality with him.¹⁰³ How marvelous is this God who takes the broken fellowship with the ones he made in his image and restores it everlastingly! Yes, God invites the finite into the eternal. He takes that which could end

¹⁰²Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:609.

¹⁰³Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 47.

in death and instead offers everlasting life—an everlasting life with him! In God’s eternal presence, there will be fullness of joy (Ps 16:11). In God’s eternal presence, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). Mortal bodies will put on immortality. Perishable humanity will become everlastingly imperishable (1 Cor 15:53-54). From that moment when Christ returns to take and present his Bride, the church, to the Father, Christians will be with the Lord forever and ever (1 Thess 4:17)!¹⁰⁴ Marvel at the eternal, everlasting God who invites his children to join in his eternity in uninterrupted fellowship with him forever.

Summary of God’s Immanence Grounded in Transcendence

God is transcendent. God is also immanent. An appropriate reading of Scripture requires the acknowledgment of both characteristics. Yet, one takes priority over the other. One flows from the other. One provides the appropriate context for the other. One is the foundation upon which the other is built.

When rightly understood, the immanence of God never stands alone. God’s immanence is always an extension or an implication of his transcendent qualities. When immanence is interpreted against the backdrop of transcendence, God is appropriately viewed in the grandeur and majesty he possesses. When the immanence of God is contemplated in isolation, the knowledge of God is incomplete. When the immanence of

¹⁰⁴Barth writes that God decided “on the Church as the fellowship of those who are to be wakened to faith in his Word by his Holy Spirit and to be preserved in this faith. And with this, he determined the goal of all his willing, the salvation of all who believe and their blessedness in his own eternal hereafter” (Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:622).

God is considered independently, man's understanding and view of God is diminished. When the immanence of God is perceived separately from the transcendence of God, the worship of God will ultimately suffer.

God is loving and kind; yet, God's loving-kindness flows from his transcendent inter-Trinitarian love displayed within the self-sufficient Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who eternally exist in social unity. Though he is loving and kind, he is simultaneously wrathful and a righteous judge of all humanity. God's immanent wrath is an outflow of his transcendent holiness. While God is a God of wrath, he is also a God of mercy and grace. His mercy, grace, and redeeming love are outflows of God's transcendent eternal love displayed within the Trinity. Likewise, God's jealousy and exclusivity claims flow out of this same transcendent inter-Trinitarian love displayed within the Trinity.

God is with his creation as one who cares for and provides for his creation. Yet, God's provision is the immanent expression of God's transcendent creatorness. God's inescapability by his creation and his immanent nearness to his creation are extensions of his transcendent omnipresence. God's faithfulness and reliability are immanent overflows of God's constant immutability. The wisdom of God who perpetually has personal knowledge of each person on his mind when making decisions is an immanent expression of God's transcendent omniscience. Finally, the personal, intimate, immanent invitation to enter into eternal life and eternal uninterrupted fellowship with God is an extension of God's own eternity, atemporality, and everlastingness.

For God to be rightly understood and rightly worshiped, he must be apprehended in the arrayed splendor of one who is first and primarily transcendent and only then as one who is intimately involved in and with his creation. This concept, this rhythm—the rhythm of transcendence and then immanence—is the framework through which Scripture reveals God and the way men of the Bible meet with God in personal or corporate worship settings. The rhythm of transcendence and then immanence is key to a robust, accurate view of God and a necessary antidote for the rush to immanence that persists in many evangelical free churches.

In chapter 7, I will demonstrate this pattern of transcendence then immanence throughout both the Old and New Testaments to support this dissertation’s claim that in divine-human encounters, the Bible demonstrates a repeated pattern of conceptualizing and understanding God in his transcendent otherness both prior to his immanence and as the framework within which his immanence can only be rightly understood and experienced. However, before proceeding to the biblical data that engage the proposition of this thesis, I will now address one important potential objection to my thesis in the next chapter entitled “The Transcendent God Who Draws Near—A Christological Reflection.”

CHAPTER 6
THE TRANSCENDENT GOD WHO DRAWS NEAR—
A CHRISTOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Introduction

From before the foundation of the world, the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—existed in eternal union as one Godhead comprised of three distinct persons with three different roles. Though distinctly three, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are uniquely one, each member of the Trinity possessing every aspect of the divine nature and each member of the Trinity being fully God.¹

In the New Testament, the second person of the Trinity—the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ—fulfilled a unique role in God’s great redemptive work recorded in Scripture. In coming to earth, Christ inaugurated a new covenant between God and man, a new covenant that would ultimately require the shedding of his own blood—royal blood, divine blood—to deliver and pardon all those who would repent and believe. Christ’s mission was to seek and to save the lost, to give his life as a ransom for many, to redeem his Bride, and to do for man that which man could not do for himself—live a perfectly undefiled life of obedience to the Lord. As the sinless Christ, he was singularly and uniquely qualified to offer himself as the atoning sacrifice for sinful mankind.

¹Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 69.

Jesus in the New Testament is called Immanuel which means, “God with us” (Matt 1:23). Christ was God revealed in human flesh, the ultimate expression of God’s nearness. He was at once fully God *and* fully man.² As the God-man, Christ was born of the virgin Mary. He grew up in the loving care of a carpenter’s family. Luke wrote that the young years of Jesus were marked with favor in the eyes of God the Father and in the eyes of men (Luke 2:40, 52). As Jesus grew, he frequently could be found in the Jewish synagogue preaching and teaching in ways that astonished the religious leaders of his day. Near the age of thirty, Christ began his public ministry to the physically and spiritually sick. His ministry was marked by recurrent alterations of the natural world by the supernatural—a phenomenon the Bible calls miracles. Blind people were healed. Lame people were made to walk. Hungry people were fed. The infirm and diseased were cured. Brokenness was restored. As Christ walked among his creation, he cared for them, loved them, provided for them, extended grace and mercy to them, and listened to their pleas. He taught Truth as one who had authority. In fact, he taught them as one who was the central subject matter of the scriptures themselves (Luke 24:44; John 5:39). As he taught, he called men and women to repent of their sins in response to the kingdom of God which was drawing near in a way never before known to man.

Many of the religious leaders were skeptical, even threatened by Christ’s actions and teaching. Christ did what only God could do—forgive sins. In addition, he made what sounded to them the absurd and blasphemous claim of being God (John 8:58; 10:30; 14:9). In monotheistic Judaism, the forgiveness of sins was the prerogative of

²Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 543.

Yahweh alone, and Yahweh alone exercised exclusive rights to be acknowledged and worshiped as the one and only God of the Jews.³ For another to claim to be God was a heretical pronouncement punishable by death.

Ironically, the people of God in Jesus' day longed for a deliverer, a Messiah. Their oppression by the Romans was yet another in a series of political and social persecutions from which the Jews desired to be free. The prophets of old had predicted the coming of Messiah to make straight the crooked paths, to right the intolerable injustices, and to set the oppressed free. Jesus was the messianic fulfillment of the entire catalogue of biblical ancient prophecies. Sadly, many did not see Christ as the realization of God's promises contained in their sacred writings. Many neither recognized nor acknowledged Jesus as God or the Christ. The Apostle John records this startling exchange between a group of Jews and Jesus recorded in John 8:48-58:

⁴⁸“Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” ⁴⁹Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” ⁵²The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’” ⁵³Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” ⁵⁴Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’” ⁵⁵But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” ⁵⁷So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

³Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 189; see also Deut 5:7-9.

In their presence stood God in the flesh, the one whose name is “I Am.” God had come to dwell with his people, to walk among them, to touch them personally, to speak with them face to face, to live among them, and, for a time, to be one of them. Eminence became immanent. The transcendent God of the universe had stepped out of heaven, taken on human flesh, and was walking in tangible fellowship and in immanent proximity to those whom he had created. In many ways, he was one of them. God incarnate, Immanuel, was with his people, but only a few had eyes to see and faith to believe this reality.

The gospel writers chronicle Christ’s tragic rejection and brutal crucifixion by the very people he came to deliver. Yet, Scripture is careful to note that man did not ultimately bring about Christ’s death. Instead, Christ himself chose to lay down his life freely and obediently to God the Father (John 10:17-18). As God the Son, he was almighty; in his divinity, he possessed infinite power and could have stopped the crucifixion proceedings at any moment. Instead, keeping his divine omnipotence at bay, in his humanity he laid down his life to the praise, honor, and glory of God the Father. Christ willingly submitted to his Father’s will and design to redeem the world through the shedding of divine blood—the only way for sin’s penalty to be erased and men’s souls to be redeemed. As Christ the God-man took his last breath on the cross, he shouted, “It is finished” (John 19:30). The legal transaction was complete. The ransom for wrecked humanity was paid in full. Sinless, divine/human blood was poured out. The wrath of a holy, righteous, and just God was satisfied. Christ the Redeemer’s work was complete. Finished. As foretold by the prophet Isaiah, Christ was

⁵ . . . pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
⁶All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. (Isa 53:5-6)

God the immanent Son—Immanuel, God with us—gave his life so whoever would believe in him would never die but have eternal life. In God’s divine plan, he came to redeem, to buy back, and to secure the pardon for undeserving sinners. God’s purchase of sinners was personal, intimate, and in the flesh—the ultimate expression of divine immanence.

The question germane to this dissertation is this: should the profound manifestation of God’s immanence in Christ alter the way in which humans initially and foundationally view him? In Christ, is the rhythm of transcendence then immanence reversed, or is transcendence deleted altogether as a means by which we should think about God? Because God came to earth personally in Christ, some might argue that God’s transcendence has now been replaced by immanence and, therefore, is no longer an appropriate distinction through which to view and understand God. Others might contend an incongruity between how the Old Testament views God the Father and how the New Testament views God the Son. The incongruity, some could say, sees God the Father as most vividly depicted as transcendent in the Old Testament and Christ the Son depicted primarily as immanent in the New Testament; therefore, since we are “New Testament” people, God’s immanence is now the appropriate grounding for how God should be conceptualized and understood. Still others could maintain that since Christ came to establish a new covenant that essentially promises everlasting immanent and intimate fellowship between God and his people (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 37:24-28), then the

era of God's distance and "otherness" has given way to the era of nearness and fellowship. To these people, God is no longer "wholly other" but rather immanently close in the person of Christ.

In the next few paragraphs, I will contend that Christ, though wonderfully and immanently near, may best and rightly be understood only within the context of his divine transcendent otherness that was neither diminished nor deleted by the incarnation. God the Son was transcendent in eternity past and will continue to be the transcendent God of the universe who will be praised forevermore throughout eternity to the glory of God the Father. I will demonstrate Christ's transcendence by examining an Old Testament portrait of Christ, the Old and New Testaments' representation of Christ as the agent of creation, the New Testament's depiction of the incarnation of Christ, the exaltation of Christ, and Christ's divine transcendent attributes.

An Old Testament Portrait of Christ

Though many primarily see Christ as the ultimate expression of God's nearness to his creation, Isaiah 6:1-8 is a remarkable and clear demonstration that Christ is first and foremost the transcendent King of kings and Lord of lords.⁴ He is majestic in splendor, eternally holy, and infinitely glorious. The prophet Isaiah was granted a

⁴"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!' And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!' Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.' And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.'" (Isa 6:1-8)

glimpse of the transcendent God of the universe in a way that few men have ever experienced. Isaiah gazed upon the majesty of God, the glory of God, and the magnificence of God. As he did, Isaiah became completely undone (Isa 6:5). He was in the audience of the King, the almighty, the one whom no one could look upon and live. Isaiah was finitude in the presence of the infinite, stained in the face of purity, creature in the audience of the Creator, unworthy in the midst of inestimable worth, need in the midst of sufficiency, contingent in the face of the noncontingent, and sin in the midst of atonement.

This vision of the Lord reminds and instructs Christians that God is not human; he is grand and glorious, wholly other, and infinitely holy. Though initially Isaiah 6 seems to be recording the prophet's vision of God the Father, the Apostle John many centuries later makes a startling revelation about the nature of this theophany: "Isaiah said these things because he saw his [Christ's] glory and spoke of him" (John 12:41).⁵ The revelation of God in Isaiah 6 is astoundingly that of the second person of the Trinity, the pre-incarnate Son, who would later come in the flesh as Jesus Christ! Isaiah saw *Christ* in all of his transcendent glory. Isaiah 6 pictures Christ in eternity past. He is

⁵D. A. Carson states that the most natural referent to the pronoun "his" in John 12:41 is Jesus (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991], 449). Carson acknowledged an alternative possibility purported by Craig Evans that John is saying that Jesus *is* God's glory and that, in seeing God's glory, Isaiah was seeing Christ (Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 50; and Craig A. Evans, "Obduracy and the Lord's Servant: Some Observations on the Use of the Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel," in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee*, ed. William Hugh Brownlee, Craig A. Evans, and William F. Stinespring, [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987], 232). Thomas Schreiner agrees that John is claiming that Isaiah saw the glory of Christ and, in so doing, is placing him "on the same level as the Father" (Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 243; see also 639).

surrounded by seraphim singing “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isa 6:3b). Isaiah saw *Christ*—transcendent, high and lifted up!⁶

I will examine this passage in greater detail in the context of worship in the upcoming chapter. For now, I simply conclude that Isaiah 6:1 fully interpreted by John 12:41 gives credence to the assertion that Christ is viewed as transcendentally glorious in the Old Testament.

The Old and New Testaments’ Portrait of Christ as Creator

Though Christ is not named explicitly in the creation account, Genesis 1:26 implies Christ’s presence and active participation when its author recorded, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’” No definitive clarity is offered in the pages of Genesis to indicate the referent for the pronoun “us.” Some have suggested that God was speaking to his celestial court of angels. Others have said that God was using the royal pronoun “us” and, therefore, is in actuality speaking to himself.⁷ Perhaps the best explanation considers the plural “us” as indicative not of a singular presence of God the Father but an active participation of at least two members of the triune Godhead.⁸

In the prolegomena to his epistle, the Apostle John brings clarity to the identity of “us” in Genesis 1 when he writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was

⁶John 12:40, a direct reference to Isa 6:10, further supports the connection of John 12:41 to Isa 6.

⁷Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 27-28.

⁸See Gen 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8 for other examples where God speaks of himself as a plurality.

with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2). Here, John reveals two things. First, he instructs his readers that the Word, the *Logos*—the one who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14)—was Jesus himself.⁹ This Word, Christ, is pre-existent and co-eternal with God.¹⁰ He was with God from all eternity past and was/is, in fact, God. Then, John proceeds to reveal in verse 3, “All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3). Here, John remarkably discloses the identity of “us” recorded in Genesis 1:26. Not only was Jesus pre-existent with God from the beginning, but also he was the active agent through which God the Father carried out the plan to create *ex nihilo* the heavens and the earth.¹¹

Hebrews 1:2b articulates the same claim John made by stating that through Christ the whole world was created. The Apostle Paul echoes and expands this truth further by saying, “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him” (Col 1:16). In this instruction to the church at Colossae, Paul makes clear three realities. First, all things created have been brought about by God in

⁹D. A. Carson states, “God’s ‘Word’ in the Old Testament is his powerful self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation, and the personification of that ‘Word’ makes it suitable for John to apply it as a title to God’s ultimate self-disclosure, the person of his own Son” (Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 116). In the words of Thomas Schreiner, “The personal ‘Word’ that existed with God from all eternity took on flesh and became a human. The *Logos* for John is not merely a personification but a person, not merely one who existed with God for all eternity but one who has entered history as a human being” (Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 257-58). This Word both co-existed eternally with God and was indistinguishable from God. John declares that the Word, Christ, was indeed God (John 1:1).

¹⁰Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 25.

¹¹Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 90.

Christ. Second, there are no exceptions. The “all” in “all things” is meticulously encompassing. Paul’s emphasis using the stacked qualifiers of visible, invisible, thrones, dominions, heavenly, and earthly reminds the church that absolutely nothing exists outside of the creative will and determination of the uncreated Christ. Third, Christ is the goal of all creation.¹² All things were created by Christ, for Christ, and for the created purpose of declaring Christ’s glory (Col 1:16b).¹³

Both Old and New Testaments attest to God the Son’s creative transcendence. Genesis 1:26, John 1:3, Colossians 1:16, and Hebrews 1:2 each reveal that Jesus is none other than the Creator God and, by implication, that he is transcendent and distinct from all that he has made. Yet, Christ is both transcendent *and* immanent. His immanence is expressed through his personal involvement within the creative order.¹⁴ Paul described this dynamic activity in this way: “in him all things hold together” (Col 1:17b). In the words of theologian and scholar Peter O’Brien, Paul was teaching the Colossians that Christ is the “sustainer of the universe and the unifying principle of its life. Apart from his *continuous* sustaining activity . . . all would disintegrate.”¹⁵

In a similar way, the author of Hebrews declares that Christ “upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3b). This idea has both transcendent and immanent implications and, according to theologian David Allen, indicates three realities.

¹²Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 46-47.

¹³N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 77.

¹⁴Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 71.

¹⁵O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 47.

First, it indicates Christ's distinction from creation. He exists apart from the created order. He upholds creation; creation does not uphold him. He is absolutely independent of creation while creation is utterly dependent upon him. Creation needs holding and sustaining. Christ is in need of nothing. Second, Christ's "upholding of all things" indicates a transcendent sovereign control that is moving creation toward God's designed ends. Third, this verse indicates an immanent divine concurrence with the world through God's personal design, implementation, and ongoing superintendence of the natural laws of creation operating reliably, consistently, and predictably within the physical world.¹⁶

Certainly, Scripture affirms the transcendent reality of Christ as Creator of all. God the Son was with God the Father at the grand moment of inception and indeed the agent by which all of creation was spoken into existence. Therefore, just like God the Father, God the Son must be conceived of first as one who stands apart from creation, the transcendent one responsible for creation's genesis, and then the one who immanently cares for, sustains, and upholds his creation.

The New Testament's Depiction of the Incarnation of Christ—The Infinite Draws Near

As the story of redemptive history unfolds in the opening pages of the New Testament gospels, the reader is presented with a remarkable and outrageous proposition of the incarnation of God as a human. The miracle of the incarnation is challenging for the human mind to understand. How does God become human? How does the infinite take on the finite? Unpacking the intricacies of the incarnation is outside the purview of

¹⁶David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary, vol. 35 (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010), 124.

this dissertation.¹⁷ However, a few thoughts are in order concerning Christ who, like God the Father, is both transcendent and immanent—who is both transcendent first and then immanent.

The concept of the incarnation of God in Christ is accompanied by the New Testament's insistence of Christ's divine equality with God. Christ is the exact image of his transcendent (and immanent) Father. Hebrews 1:3 states that Christ is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature." Christ reflects the light of God with a brilliance that shatters every shred of darkness. In his radiance, he images God's glory because he is the precise representation of his Father. Though distinct in person, Christ shares the Father's essence and, therefore, "no difference can be made between the nature of the Father and the nature of the Son."¹⁸ Christ is "God of very God" and "light from light."¹⁹ Christ is a human, tangible picture of the God who is invisible (Col 1:15). Jesus attested his own equality with God when he himself said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). In John 10:30, Jesus made this astounding declaration and revelation, "I and the Father are one."

Scripture teaches that, in the incarnation, God himself became one with man. God did not simply enter into a deeper fellowship with man nor did God simply care for him in an even greater way by removing sin's penalty. God, in Jesus, became *one* with

¹⁷For a strong evangelical treatment of the humanity of Christ, see Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

¹⁸Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 70-71; and Allen, *Hebrews*, 119.

¹⁹Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, The Nicene Creed, in "Historic Church Documents," accessed November 20, 2014, <http://reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://reformed.org/documents/nicene.html>.

man.²⁰ The Creator himself became a creature, a man. Philippians 2:6-8, a passage that has long fascinated and perplexed theologians and students of the Bible, provides insight on how the divine and human flesh unite in the incarnation:

⁶[Christ Jesus], who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Taking on the form of a human, Christ left his heavenly dwelling place, united himself with flesh like that which he once formed and fashioned in Genesis, and became a man forever.

As the “Son of Man,”²¹ Jesus became the human face of God.²² He was God with skin on. Though God is spiritual and incorporeal, he chose to assume a physical form in the incarnation.²³ In his humanness, Christ became tired and rested. He became hungry and broke bread with his friends. He grew thirsty and drank. He laughed and wept as a human. He loved, grieved, mourned, and became angry as a human. He experienced pain as a human and ultimately died as a human. As a human, he made a sacrifice for the human penalty of sin charged to all of the sons and daughters of Adam.

²⁰Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God*, pt. 1, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 514.

²¹The “Son of Man” is Christ’s most common title for himself. “Son of Man” is used thirty-two times in Matthew, fourteen times in Mark, twenty-six times in Luke, and twelve times in John. Each time, “Son of Man” is exclusively used by Christ of himself (*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England [Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003], s.v. “Son of Man”).

²²Harm Goris, Herwi Rikhof, and Henk Schoot, eds., *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Work of Thomas Aquinas* (Walpole, MA: Peeters Leuven, 2009), 34.

²³Donald G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 89.

In so doing, Christ became the eschatological Adam who reconciled the broken relationship between the mundane and the Divine.²⁴

As Christ took on humanity and became a man, however, he did not cease to be God. He lives now eternally as the Son of God, “the second person of the Trinity, but also as Jesus, the man who was born of Mary, and as Christ, the Messiah and Savior of his people. Jesus will remain fully God and fully man, yet one person, forever.”²⁵ It is important to note that God in his immanence in no way limits himself. In Christ, God assumed “a human nature which he united with but never confounded with his divine nature.”²⁶ Karl Barth in his *Church Dogmatics* asserts, “He does not give up being God in becoming a creature, in becoming man. He does not cease to be God. He does not come into conflict with himself.”²⁷ As God entered the world of contingency and dependence, he did not himself become dependent but remained eternal.²⁸

Therefore, in the incarnation, Christ did not subtract from himself any aspect of his deity; rather, Christ added humanity to himself. Christ was simultaneously fully God and fully man.²⁹ Scripture declares that the fullness of God resided in Christ: “For

²⁴Goris, Rikhof, and Schoot, *Divine Transcendence and Immanence*, 34.

²⁵Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 543.

²⁶Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 89.

²⁷Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 4, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, pt. 1, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 185.

²⁸Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 100.

²⁹The Council of Nicaea (AD 325) and the subsequent Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) convened to speak against heresies of the early Christian church, particularly in the arena of Christ’s identity, divinity, humanity, and relationship to God the Father. The following documents were produced by each council to affirm Christ’s deity and humanity, eternality, and co-equality with God.

The Nicene Creed. “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,

in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 1:19). Therefore, it would be incorrect to postulate that Christ’s incarnation was an exchange of deity for humanity. Instead, Christ’s incarnation was a taking on of flesh, an appending of humanity to his deity thereby allowing him to remain fully God while becoming fully man. In order to do this, Christ emptied himself to become an ordinary child born of an ordinary Jewish mother. This “emptying” recorded in Philippians 2:7 does not mean that Christ relinquished any of his divine attributes. Neither does “emptying” mean that he poured something out of himself; rather, “emptying” simply means that he poured himself out in his taking on of our humanity.³⁰ Paul was stressing to church at Philippi that in emptying himself, Christ who possessed all the rights and privileges of divinity set those aside to

begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

The Definition of the Council of Chalcedon. “Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us” (Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, “Historic Church Documents,” accessed November 23, 2014, <http://reformed.org/documents/index.html>).

³⁰Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, 20; and Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 210.

become an ordinary human baby born to commonplace Jewish parents in a small town in Israel.³¹ As a human, Christ was no less divine than before his incarnation. In his divinity, though he walked with humans as a human, his transcendent attributes were fully intact although veiled for a period of time.³²

Truly, Christ is God himself and became personally enfleshed through the incarnation. Yet, Christ never ceased to be God. He put on humanity but did not take off his transcendent deity. Therefore, to be rightly and most fully understood, Christ must be viewed as he is presented in Scripture—first as the transcendent God of the universe and then as the one who immanently took on flesh and walked among us.

The Exaltation of Christ

In the second half of what has become commonly referred to as the “Hymn to Christ” chronicled in Philippians 2, Paul records these remarkable words: “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11). Through this text, Paul provides for the church at Philippi and the church of all time a remarkable glimpse of the exaltation of Christ by God the Father. God’s actions are directly linked to Christ’s obedience and self-humbling.³³ In response to Christ’s

³¹*ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2283.

³²In an individual discussion, Bruce Ware commented that when Christ took on humanity, he accepted limitations on the expression, not the possession, of divine attributes that conflict with integral authentic human experience. For further elucidation, see Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, 20-24; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 325-26; and Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 532-63.

³³Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 234.

“condescension, humiliation, abject degradation, and a death of the worst possible kind,” God the Father exalts Christ to the highest possible station of “unparalleled honor and universal authority.”³⁴

Not only does God exalt him to the place of highest authority, but he also grants to Christ a name that transcends every other name. God gave Christ not just any name but his very own name, Yahweh, the Lord! In view of Isaiah 42:8, “I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other,” the designation of “Lord” is the rarest of all honors and the title that outranks all others.³⁵ The name “Lord” commands universal reverence, humble deference, and unending worship. One day, every knee will bow in obeisance before Christ in worship. One day, every tongue will declare that Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. This is an amazing scene prefigured by Paul in Philippians that will be gloriously fulfilled in the Parousia.³⁶

The exalted Christ is gloriously distinct from his creation. He is majestically transcendent in name and mightily transcendent in universal lordship. He reigns in magnificent splendor in universal authority with the name, the Lord, granted by God the Father to Christ the Son. Therefore, exalted transcendence provides the appropriate framework for understanding the fullness of the person of Christ and the necessary lens through which his tender immanence must be interpreted.

³⁴O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 236-37, 252. “Because of the faithfulness of this incarnate Son, because of his humble obedience in going to the cross, God highly exalted him. His position of honor and authority was not his position as the eternal Son of the Father but as the obedient incarnate Son, the human Messiah” (Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, 140).

³⁵O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 238.

³⁶Christ, through the pen of John the Apostle, provides a magnificent look at the fulfillment of this vision in book of Revelation, a topic I will address more completely in the next chapter.

Christ's Transcendent Attributes

In the paragraphs to follow, I will briefly survey the New Testament's attestation to the transcendent attributes of Christ. Because God and Christ are co-equal and co-eternal, all transcendent attributes discussed in chapter 4 can be applied to Christ's divinity. However, a few highlights and further iterations are appropriate here.

The Transcendent Holiness of Christ

Scripture affirms the transcendent holiness of Christ. John 6:68-69 records these words of Simon Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the *Holy One* of God" (emphasis mine). Though Christ's transcendent deity was veiled to many people while he walked on the earth, others knew exactly who he was and from where he had come. Mark 1:24 records this declaration of an unclean spirit spoken through a possessed man: "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the *Holy One* of God" (emphasis mine).

Christ's holiness is often referenced in the context of Christ's role as a sacrificial lamb, one that is perfectly unblemished and without defect. God defined the criteria for sacrificial lambs acceptable for atonement in Exodus 12:5, "Your lamb shall be without blemish." Perfection was God's standard. Using this Old Testament imagery, John the Baptist announced the beginning of Christ's ministry when he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Peter highlighted the sinless or spotless nature of Christ when he referred to him as a "lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1:19). In Hebrews 4:15, the writer attests Christ's sinlessness stating, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one

who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Hebrews 9:14 also states, “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” Likewise, Paul articulates a similar idea in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Truly, Christ was and continues to be transcendentally sinless, the holy Son of the living God.

Christ’s Transcendent Immutability

Christ also possesses the transcendent quality of immutability. Scripture teaches that Christ, like God the Father, is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Heb 13:8). Christ never changes in his essence or character. In the words of the great preacher Charles Spurgeon, Christ is “everlastingly omnipotent, unchangeably omniscient. From him no attribute doth pass away; to him no parallax, no tropic, ever comes; without variableness or shadow of a turning, he abideth fast and firm.”³⁷ His throne and reign are eternal and, therefore, will never change (Heb 1:8).³⁸ The created order will one day perish, but Christ will always be the same, and his years will have no end (Heb 1:10-12). Also, Christ will always be the same in his tri-unity with the Father. He will forever be the beloved Son of the Father and will always be the object of the Father’s infinite affection.

³⁷Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Immutability of Christ,” in The Spurgeon Archive, accessed August 8, 2014, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0170.htm>.

³⁸Allen, *Hebrews*, 179.

Christ's transcendent immutability is expressed immanently to his creation as he forever stands as an advocate for the repentant sinner to the Father. His role as the great high priest and mediator on behalf of the elect will never change (Heb 7). The efficacy of Christ's one-time atoning sacrifice will never be anything other than completely and sufficiently satisfying of the righteous requirements of holy God for the salvation of men's souls (Heb 10:14).

The Transcendent Omnipotence of Christ

Christ is also transcendentally all-powerful. Like the Father, Christ's power is limitless. Nothing is too hard for him to do. His power and authority are infinite. He has the ability to do anything he wills to do. Christ's omnipotence is indicated by the writer of Hebrews when he states that Christ "is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3a). Christ's word is powerful, all-powerful, and his unlimited power continues to preserve the world and maintain its order. Paul in his letter to the church at Colossae records a similar idea. Colossians 1:17 states that Christ is "before all things, and in him all things hold together." Paul is reminding the first generation Christians that Christ is both eternal ("before all things"), and that he is eternally omnipotent. As the resurrected Son, his divine omnipotence and sovereign rule are demonstrated tacitly but no less powerfully in creation's continuing existence and orderly functionality.³⁹

³⁹O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 47.

The Transcendent Omnipresence of Christ

Omnipresence and localized presence are both characteristics of Christ. In his incarnation, Christ affixed human flesh and bone to his deity, a localized corporeal manifestation of his person. After his ascension, Scripture teaches that Christ is physically present with God the Father, that he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, and that he will return as an embodied Savior in the same manner as he ascended into heaven after his resurrection. How Christ can be both ubiquitous as well as embodied, localized flesh is a great mystery.

Scripture does not advocate Christ's omnipresence during his earthly ministry. However, looking forward to the future establishment of the church, Scripture records two key passages attesting his ubiquity. First, Christ speaks these words in relationship to future Christians who would believe in him, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt 18:20). Also, Christ's last words to his disciples prior to his ascension encourage them with this truth, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20b).⁴⁰ Ultimately, the Spirit was sent by Christ to be a representation of himself to all people in all places at all times (John 14:15-17; 15:26).

The Transcendent Eternality of Christ

Christ's eternity is demonstrated throughout the New Testament. Again, in the prolegomena to John, Christ, the Word, is revealed to have been with God in the beginning (John 1:1). This verse along with Colossians 1:15 and Philippians 2:6 instructs that Jesus himself was pre-existent with God the Father from the beginning (and prior to

⁴⁰Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 548.

the beginning of creation).⁴¹ Jesus reveals his own eternity when he prayed these words to God, “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (John 17:5). In Revelation, Christ’s eternal nature continues to be highlighted as Jesus declares that he is the Alpha and Omega, the one who (eternally) was, who (eternally) is, and who (eternally) will always be (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).

Christ is transcendentally timeless and temporally everlasting. He lives now, and he lives forevermore as the holy, spotless, glorious Lamb of God—the King of kings and the Lord of lords—worthy of unceasing worship and forever praised throughout eternity!

Conclusion

Jesus Christ. Immanuel. God with us. The very idea of God walking among sinful humanity is an astounding thought. God drew near. His omnipresence became ultra-presence. God became one of us. He walked like us, talked like us, worked like us, and played like us. Why would God choose to become a man? He had no need to do so, in himself, as God. Yet, he chose to dwell with his people as a human. Astonishing!

Christ was the means by which God chose to physically abide with his people. In Christ, God tangibly drew near again—a seemingly impossible action in light of the great separation that took place in Genesis 3. The infinite took on finitude. The Creator became a creature. Holiness mingled with the unclean. The timelessly eternal

⁴¹Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 114; Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 74-75; and Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 194; see also 202-3.

experienced aging. The omnipotent took on frailty. The all-sufficient one became dependent on a carpenter and his wife. The immutable became wrapped in flesh that bled, skin that perspired, eyes that wept, a heart that grieved, and a body that fatigued. Remarkable! Immanuel—God being “with us” is an incomprehensibly glorious and gracious act of mercy and love. Thanks be to God!

God’s drawing near in Christ is the subject of one of the most profound meta-storylines of Scripture. However, to fully appreciate the person and work of Jesus, we must step back and apprehend the fullness of this Jesus who was God with us. The immanence of God the Son, like the immanence of God the Father, is grounded in his transcendence. When Christ became a man, his transcendence was not obliterated or diminished in the least. Instead, he permanently added humanity to his deity while in no way subtracting deity from himself.⁴² He was indeed more than a carpenter. He was more than a carpenter’s son. He was first transcendent and remains transcendent throughout all eternity.

Today, much focus is placed on Christ’s immanent love for *us*, his sacrifice for *us*, his finished work on the cross for *us*, and his compassion for *us*. In focusing on what Christ did for *us*, we can too often lose sight of who Christ is apart from us. He is the King of glory. He is God, the almighty—the one who dwells eternally with the Father and the Spirit. He is the voice (Word) of creation while simultaneously being the one whose word is upholding creation. He is timeless and unchangeable and the rock of humanity’s salvation. He needs nothing and is dependent on no one. Possessing the

⁴²Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 543.

wisdom of the ages, he rules and reigns with divine regal authority over all that he has made.

Yes, Christ is God in the flesh. He was born, walked among us, and became one of us. Yet, may we never forget that he is the transcendent God of the universe who is worthy of worship, reverence, wonder, fear, and praise. Stand in awe of the one who is gloriously transcendent and mercifully immanent—Jesus Christ, God with us.

Having established the biblical historical grounding of transcendence, the biblical grounding of immanence in transcendence, and that Christ is rightly and fully understood when his immanence is viewed through the lens of his transcendence, this dissertation now turns to its main focal point—the rhythms of transcendence and immanence demonstrated in prayers and worship settings recorded in the Bible.

CHAPTER 7

THE RHYTHM OF TRANSCENDENCE THEN IMMANENCE REPRESENTED IN DIVINE WORSHIP ENCOUNTERS AND BIBLICAL PRAYERS

Having established the biblical groundings of God's transcendence and the understanding that God's immanent expressions are transcendently derivative and that Christ, though immanently God with us, continually remains transcendent, I now turn to the central focus of this dissertation: the rhythm of transcendence then immanence. My research will demonstrate that the rhythm of God's transcendence then immanence is a recurring pattern represented in Scripture specifically in personal and corporate worship encounters with God and in prayers offered to God. If accepted as true, the rhythm of transcendence then immanence should have a profound impact on the development of a liturgical theology that would apply this rhythm in the conception and planning of corporate worship services. In addition, acknowledgement and application of this descriptive pattern have the potential to influence the mindset of worshipers as they approach God and the entire ethos of worship in many houses of God throughout Christendom.

The Bible as a whole moves in a large cycle revealing God first as transcendent and then immanent. The scriptural authors never depict God as simply immanent; moreover, Scripture does not present the possibility of fallen man to intimately commune with the holy and transcendent God apart from mediation. Because

God is always transcendent first, God's immanence finds its appropriate grounding, definition, and interpretation in his transcendence. All immanence derives from God's transcendence.¹

Though transcendence and immanence are complementary characteristics of God, they must be understood by believers in the appropriate sequence for God to be rightly comprehended. Specifically, divine transcendence must be acknowledged and understood first in order for the immanence of the divine to be rightly interpreted. Hence, the starting place for understanding the beauty of divine nearness is the infinite incongruence between God and man.² God is not like man. Man is finite. God is infinite. Man's life is short. God is timelessly eternal. Man is sinful. God is absolute purity. Man is frail. God is strong. Man's knowledge is limited. God's knowledge is exhaustive. Man is contingent and dependent. God is noncontingent and independent. Man is needy. God needs nothing. Man is earthbound. God is free in every way. Yet, this God who is independent of the world he created chooses to draw near to his creation, to be active in and with his creation, and to love those he created in his image—in a word, to be immanent in and with his creation. In the words of Bruce Ware,

The divine immanence is made far more meaningful and can rightly be understood, only when we comprehend the astonishing truth that the God who relates to us is the God who stands apart from creation, in the fullness of his infinite and eternal glory and perfection, needing no part of what he has made, yet longing to give himself to this very world that contributes nothing to his own existence or fullness. In this sense, then, transcendence takes priority over immanence.³

¹Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 152.

²Ibid., 46; see also 159.

³Ibid., 61.

God's nearness, love, compassion, and condescension can only be properly understood when interpreted against the backdrop of the God who exists "eternally in the infinite fullness of his own intrinsic beauty, truth, joy, goodness, godliness, and all perfection."⁴ Therefore, the proper sequence of the rhythm of transcendence then immanence becomes vitally important to the proper formation of liturgical theology. Does this pattern indeed appear in Scripture? Does Scripture demonstrate that the weight, priority, and precedence of God's transcendence must define his immanence? I believe that it does and will show how it does in this chapter.

The thesis of this dissertation asserts that in divine-human encounters, the Bible demonstrates a repeated pattern of conceptualizing and understanding God in his transcendent otherness both prior to his immanence and as the framework within which his immanence can only be rightly understood and experienced. This chapter will provide a second-order theological reflection on Scripture's first-order depictions of interactions between God and man in worship settings and in prayers offered to God. Because the New Testament says relatively little about worship form or praxis, especially in light of Christ's fulfillment and ending of most of the Old Testament cultic practices, it becomes necessary for modern worship leaders to search the Bible as a whole to see if biblical models or recurring scriptural patterns exist that may help to theologically guide worship praxis and worship service design.

⁴Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 61.

Worship Defined

Before launching into the biblical data, I believe it helpful to briefly consider and define Christian worship. Many theologians and worship leaders of late have offered a variety of explanations and definitions, but I would like to put forward the following: worship begins with divine self-revelation followed by man's corporate and personal response to God for who he is and what he has done. Christian worship is offered to God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.⁵ Worship is ultimately a dialogue initiated by the living God in which believers participate as responders to the gracious condescension of God's self-revelation to those called out to be children of God.⁶ Worship demonstrates the value system of the heart and is an ultimate expression of what the heart values most. Based on Exodus 20:3-5, Psalm 29:1-2, Luke 4:8, Romans 12:1-2, Hebrews 11:6, and the model of worship recorded in Revelation 4:11, worship is fundamentally a declaration of God's supreme worth and an acknowledgement of his exclusive sovereign lordship articulated by the human heart through adoration and demonstrated by the life lived in surrendered obedience and faith.⁷

⁵Donald P. Hustad, *True Worship: Reclaiming the Wonder and Majesty* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1998), 40; and John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 94.

⁶Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2006), 50; and Bruce Leafblad, "Evangelical Worship: A Biblical Model for the Twenty-First Century," in *Experience God in Worship*, ed. Michael D. Warden (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2000), 96.

⁷The following Scripture passages are but a small sampling of the biblical witness to worship's fundamental components which give rise to my definition: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God. . . ." (Exod 20:3-5a); "Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness" (Ps 29:1-2); "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be

Often thought of as exclusively a human endeavor, worship predates the creation of earth and human beings. In eternity past, the Bible records the heavenly activity of worship by angels and celestial beings. Then, at the moment God chose to create the universe, his creative act was the effective cause of human worship and, indeed, the causal catalyst of God's glory being declared by all of creation (Ps 19). All that God chose to create worships (Pss 96; 148). In fact, all creation—celestial, terrestrial, and human—is designed for worship and created to both reflect and declare his glory.⁸

Worship is made possible through the gracious initiative of God. As Creator, he is initiator. That which is created is a responder or reflector. He initiates; creation responds. The Bible speaks of worship in four broad categories. First, *worship* is the adoration of God, attributing ultimate value and praise to God for his intrinsic nature, infinite perfections, and work. Second, *worship* describes the activity of the gathered people of God empowered by the Holy Spirit to celebrate the Christ event to the glory of God the Father. Third, *worship* is used to describe the private religious expression of an

conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:1-2); "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve" (Luke 4:8); "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Heb 11:6); and "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (Rev 4:11). See also G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 283.

⁸Since the genesis of human history, a worship vacuum has never existed (Noel Due, *Created for Worship: From Genesis to Revelation to You* [Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005], 230). Humans at all times and for all time have worshiped and will worship, reflect, serve, or bow down to something or someone (Harold Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003], 17). In God's divine plan, people were designed to unavoidably reflect what they most revere, either for their good or to their detriment. Scripture instructs that people are created both in the image of God and to image God, to reflect the glory of the one who created them. All people at all times everywhere either reflect their Creator or reflect something created (Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 284).

individual person, family, or small group to God. Finally, *worship* refers to the whole of life's activity (cf. Rom 12:1-2).⁹

Old Testament worship was not so much a form of intimacy with God or an indication of a special affection toward him as one might think today. Rather, the ancient Hebrews' worship was an expression of awe and wonder coupled with grateful submission to him as Creator, ruler, gracious provider, Lord, and King.¹⁰ Old Testament worship embodied a reverential fear of the Lord coupled with obediently fulfilling his covenant demands. The worship rituals in the Old Testament, including the substitutionary sacrificial system and the intermediary practices of the priests, would later be fulfilled in and superseded by Christ in the New Testament. After Christ's crucifixion for the idolatrous sins of mankind and his subsequent resurrection/ascension, the New Testament practices of the early church began to include overwhelming gratitude to the Lord for his great work of salvation through redemption in Christ. For those redeemed by the blood of Christ, worship is not about *an* activity of one's life, it is "*the* activity of one's life, which gives that entire life focus and direction. It is a core orientation rather than a peripheral action."¹¹

The issue of human sin as it relates to worship is not the absence of worship (which is humanly impossible), but rather the presence of wrongly focused or wrongly

⁹C. E. B. Cranfield, "Divine and Human Action: The Biblical Concept of Worship," *Interpretation* 12 (1958): 387.

¹⁰David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 73.

¹¹Due, *Created for Worship*, 20.

formulated worship.¹² Suitable responses of worship to God are governed by God and are outlined in Scripture. Scripture draws sharp distinctions between true worship and false worship.¹³ Acceptable worship means approaching God or engaging with God on his terms, in ways that he designs, and through avenues that he makes possible.¹⁴ Four distinct possibilities for worship and/or its perversion are as follows:

1. Worshiping the right God in the wrong way.
2. Worshiping the wrong god in the wrong way.
3. Worshiping the wrong god in the right way.
4. Worshiping the right God in the right way.¹⁵

The ultimate byproduct of this dissertation is to enable the twenty-first century church to worship the right God in a more right way. Now, let us explore the biblical data.

The Rhythm of Transcendence Then Immanence— Biblical Encounters with God

The following paragraphs will examine the rhythm of transcendence then immanence in seven specific encounters with God: Moses and the burning bush, worship at Mount Sinai, worship at the inauguration of the temple, worship at the restoration of the temple, the conversation between Job and God, the worship scene recorded in Isaiah 6,

¹²Due, *Created for Worship*, 27.

¹³John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1996), 38.

¹⁴Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 283.

¹⁵Bruce H. Leafblad (classroom lecture notes, 573-625—*Music in Worship*, Fall 1992, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX).

and worship in the Eschaton recorded in Revelation. In addition, the rhythm of transcendence and immanence will be examined in significant prayers of Israel's kings, prayers of the prophets and other Old Testament figures, the Song of Moses, the sung prayers recorded in the Hebrew Psalter, New Testament prayers, and the prayers of Christ.

Both large sections of this chapter, "The Rhythm of Transcendence Then Immanence—Biblical Encounters with God" and "The Rhythm of Transcendence Then Immanence Represented in Significant Prayers of the Bible" contain prayers. However, the prayers contained in former tend to be broader, are offered in the context of a more direct encounter or interaction with God, and/or generally record God's direct verbal or tangible manifestation of his presence as a part of a dialogic interaction. Also, not every relevant text will be discussed; rather, I have included a broad spectrum of substantial key passages that support my claim that the Bible demonstrates a repeated pattern of conceptualizing and understanding God in his transcendent otherness both prior to his immanence and as the framework within which his immanence can be most fully understood and experienced.

Moses Meets the Lord (Exod 3)

The Bible paints a remarkable scene in the opening chapters of Exodus. In preparation to emancipate his people from the cruel taskmasters of the Egyptian Pharaohs, God called out to Moses from the burning bush, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exod 3:5). God immediately established his transcendent otherness and holiness as the context of this divine encounter. Moses, in greater proximity to transcendent holiness than most men ever experience, was required to remove his shoes in the presence of God's holiness.

Then, God's revealed his immanent care for his people to Moses saying, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. . . ." (Exod 3:7-8a). The rhythm of transcendence then immanence was thus established and would continue to be a defining characteristic of God's interactions with his covenant people.

Israel Meets the Lord at Mount Sinai (Exod 19-24)

Exodus 5-12 records Pharaoh's initial rejections of God's command to free his people. After the judgment of God was administered through the sending of ten plagues, Pharaoh acquiesced, and the people of God were freed to vacate Egypt. They left by the hundreds of thousands carrying with them the spoils of Egypt—silver, gold, jewelry, and clothing (Exod 12:35). When pursued by the regretful armies of Pharaoh, the mighty hand of the Lord parted the Red Sea providing an escape route for all of Israel to walk through unharmed on a dried ocean floor. The encroaching Egyptian army equipped with horses and chariots, when finally allowed to venture into the parted Red Sea, were totally annihilated as the hand of the Lord released the once-parted waters. Out of bondage, out of slavery, and out of misery, the people of God were finally free—free to worship and free to become the nation once promised to Abraham hundreds of years before. Leaving behind the Red Sea, God's people now journeyed through the wilderness to Sinai Mountain where they would worship and receive God's word for them. God was renewing his covenant with his people, the same covenant he made with Abraham. The

Lord spoke these words and commanded Moses to deliver them to his people: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel” (Exod 19:5-6).

At Sinai, the Lord appeared on the mountain in the form of a thick cloud of devouring fire in the sight of Israel (Exod 19:18; 24:17). His voice was like thunder; the mountain trembled. This was the scene set for Israel to know and worship their God. Though God graciously provides means by which people may approach him, Scripture is clear of the terms and conditions by which they can come near. He gave strict instructions that the people could come near to the mountain, but only to a certain point and no more. They could not ascend the mountain or touch the mountain’s edge. Note the restrictions of the Lord recorded in Exodus 19:10-12:

¹⁰ . . . Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments ¹¹and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹²And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, “Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.”

This Scripture passage is a poignant reminder that in God’s immanence, he is still the transcendent, holy Creator God, not one of us, though he is never far from us. In essence, God was making this statement: “you may come so far and no farther.” The finite can only get so close to the infinite, and sinfulness can never be in the unmediated presence of transcendent holiness. The Hebrews were allowed to approach God in worship, but his transcendent glory and infinite holiness necessitated a degree of distance, fear, and wonder.

In the stunning record of God and his people chronicled in Exodus 19ff, the rhythm of transcendent and immanence is established in worship. Depicted by a mountaintop ablaze, God is seen first as gloriously and terrifyingly holy. No man can look upon him and live. He is infinitely and majestically powerful—a consuming fire. Yet, in an astounding act of grace and love, God makes a way for holiness to dwell with a people who are never and can never be completely holy. Through his own covenant faithfulness, God establishes laws and rituals outlined in Exodus 20-23 that will call his people to obedience and provide atonement for them when they fail. Exodus 24-31 then records God—the creator of the universe, the one who dwells gloriously on mountaintops in clouds of fire, the one whose face no one can see and live, the one who is wholly other than his creation—designing a place and a means by which he and his people could tabernacle together.

Of special note is that the decision to tabernacle with his people was in every way voluntary on the part of God and in no way obligatory. The magnificence of God's voluntary choice to be immanently and intimately involved with those he loves can only be rightly understood and properly interpreted in light of his glorious transcendence. Who is this one who covenants and tabernacles with his people? He is the one who did not have to or need to dwell in covenant relationship with his people. He is first the Creator God, the fully independent one, the prime mover of the universe, the giver of all life and breath, and the source of all things. He is first the holy God, perfectly sinless, mighty in power, and free to do anything that he wills. He is first transcendent; then he is immanent. God's transcendence gives the proper context for God's immanent

interactions with his people. When transcendence is understood first, both God's transcendent otherness and immanent nearness are magnified, and God is glorified.

The worship scene at Mount Sinai is a strong example of how God intends for his people to approach him in worship. The rhythm of transcendence then immanence that will continue throughout all of Scripture is firmly established here in Exodus 19-31.

Temple Worship Inaugurated (2 Chr 6; cf. 1 Kgs 8)¹⁶

Almost 500 years after the worship scene described at Mount Sinai, Scripture records another spectacular encounter between God and his people in 2 Chronicles 6. The nation of Israel has been firmly established. Most of the territorial wars have been fought. The land of promise has been secured. The twelve tribes have taken occupancy of their designated regions. The "Golden Age" of Israel has arrived. As the reign of Israel's beloved King David comes to an end, the new reign of his son, Solomon, begins. Though David desired to build a temple for his God, Solomon was chosen by God to superintend its construction on Mount Moriah, the exact location where Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son to God almost one thousand years prior. When the temple was complete and the furnishings were installed, the arc of the covenant was brought to the temple accompanied by fervent and joyous expressions of worship by the people of Israel. In response, the glory of the Lord filled the house of God to the extent that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud of God's presence (2 Chr 5:14). It was a moment that harkened back to the thick cloud of God's presence that

¹⁶Though I will be focusing on selected prayers later in this chapter, I have included the prayer of Solomon and the prayer of the Levites here because of the broader context in which these prayers were offered, namely, the inauguration of temple worship and the reestablishment of temple worship.

rested on Mount Sinai at the initial giving of the law almost a half-millennium earlier.

Solomon, in a prayer of dedication and commitment on behalf of God's people, knelt before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all of the assembly of Israel. He spread out his hands and prayed these words recorded in 2 Chronicles 6:14-40:

¹⁴O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart, ¹⁵who have kept with your servant David my father what you declared to him. You spoke with your mouth, and with your hand have fulfilled it this day.

¹⁶Now therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father what you have promised him, saying, "You shall not lack a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk in my law as you have walked before me." ¹⁷Now therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you have spoken to your servant David.

¹⁸But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built! ¹⁹Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O Lord my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you, ²⁰that your eyes may be open day and night toward this house, the place where you have promised to set your name, that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. ²¹And listen to the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen from heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

²²If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath and comes and swears his oath before your altar in this house, ²³then hear from heaven and act and judge your servants, repaying the guilty by bringing his conduct on his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness.

²⁴If your people Israel are defeated before the enemy because they have sinned against you, and they turn again and acknowledge your name and pray and plead with you in this house, ²⁵then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them again to the land that you gave to them and to their fathers.

²⁶When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, if they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin, when you afflict them, ²⁷then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, when you teach them the good way in which they should walk, and grant rain upon your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance.

²⁸If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence or blight or mildew or locust or

caterpillar, if their enemies besiege them in the land at their gates, whatever plague, whatever sickness there is, ²⁹ whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing his own affliction and his own sorrow and stretching out his hands toward this house, ³⁰ then hear from heaven your dwelling place and forgive and render to each whose heart you know, according to all his ways, for you, you only, know the hearts of the children of mankind, ³¹ that they may fear you and walk in your ways all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our fathers.

³² Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for the sake of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm, when he comes and prays toward this house, ³³ hear from heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name.

³⁴ If your people go out to battle against their enemies, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to you toward this city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, ³⁵ then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause.

³⁶ If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to a land far or near, ³⁷ yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captivity, saying, ‘We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,’ ³⁸ if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart in the land of their captivity to which they were carried captive, and pray toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, ³⁹ then hear from heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their pleas, and maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you. ⁴⁰ Now, O my God, let your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayer of this place.

Solomon’s prayer offered in the great temple of God commences with an ascription of the transcendence of God. Solomon states emphatically in the opening of his prayer that there is no other God in heaven or on earth like the God of Israel (v. 14). God’s incomparability and uniqueness establish the context from which Solomon’s

prayer is offered.¹⁷ God is “a being of incomparable perfection.”¹⁸ He reigns in majesty. He is high and lifted up. He is immortal and dwells in unapproachable light. He is beyond human description because none other exists like him in heaven or on earth. He is immense and uncontainable by his creation. He is without peer or equal.

After Solomon establishes the transcendent nature of the God of Israel, he then turns to God’s immanent condescension expressed through divine covenantal faithfulness and love extended through David to all those who walk with God obediently.¹⁹ Then, Solomon once again referenced the uncontainable nature of Israel’s God in verse 18 where God’s transcendence is fully recognized.²⁰ Though the magnificence of the temple and the mammoth size of the temple are large by human standards, Solomon acknowledges that God is larger, grander, and more magnificent. Israel’s God is uncontainable and cannot be confined by either an earthly or heavenly location.

Verses 21, 23, 25, 27, 30, 33, 35, and 39 establish a fundamental principle of prayer and worship: namely, an accurate understanding of God’s identity and God’s dwelling place is critical to a proper approach to God.²¹ Though the temple represented a place of prayer where people could go to meet God, his ultimate dwelling place is heaven, not earth. Each request to “hear from heaven” is an acknowledgement that God’s home

¹⁷Martin J. Selman, *2 Chronicles*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 342.

¹⁸Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 585.

¹⁹Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 342.

²⁰J. A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, The New American Commentary, vol. 9 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 229.

²¹Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 343.

is celestial, not mundane. He is “lofty, holy, and mysterious.”²² Worshipers must be reminded that, though he is pleased to dwell with his people on earth, he is neither human nor earthly. Ultimately, heaven is the place where God will hear the prayers of his people, will maintain their cause, and will forgive the sins of the repentant.²³ The repeated idea, “hear from heaven,” serves to keep Solomon oriented to the transcendent nature of the God he worships.

In the chapter that follows Solomon’s prayer, God’s transcendence again comes on full display. God sends fire from heaven to consume the offerings, and the glory of the Lord fills the temple to such an extent that the priests could not enter the temple (2 Chr 7:1-3). In response, all Israel bows down in worship. Then, God graciously affirms his immanent love and care for his people when he says to Solomon, “if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place” (2 Chr 7:14-15).

Solomon’s prayer offered in the temple of God on behalf of the worshiping nation of Israel strongly demonstrates the pattern of transcendence then immanence. God’s transcendence is appropriately acknowledged first. Then, God’s transcendence forms the appropriate interpretive framework throughout the prayer by which his immanent presence, care, concern, and responses to prayer are interpreted. This scene is

²²Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, The New American Commentary, vol. 8 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 144.

²³Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, 229.

a strong example of a biblical worship encounter that acknowledges God's transcendence first and then moves to recognizing his immanent nearness.

Temple Worship Reestablished (Neh 9)

During the intervening period between the initial inauguration of the temple and its reestablishment recorded in Nehemiah 9, Israel's golden age of blessing and prosperity gave way to covenant infidelity with God, war, and the exile of the Israelites from their homeland. Around 537 BC, King Cyrus, the ruling monarch of Babylon, issued a decree finally freeing the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland. The people of God, scattered in a foreign land among the Babylonians, began their pilgrimage back to the land of promise given to them by the Lord. The returning exiles found their capital city, Jerusalem, and their place of worship, the temple, in disrepair. Nehemiah was a central figure in restoring the walls of Jerusalem and preparing God's temple to again be the central locus of the worship life of the people of God. Nehemiah called for the gathering of the people to the temple for the reading of the law and the renewal of their covenant with God. Ezra was invited to read the Torah, the Festival of Booths was observed, and the confession of sin was offered in a great ceremony of worship and covenant renewal. As a part of the ceremony, the Levites called upon the people of God to stand up and bless the great and glorious name of their exalted God (Neh 9:5). Then, the Levites prayed the following prayer to God on behalf of the people recorded in Nehemiah 9:6-38:

⁶You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. ⁷You are the Lord, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. ⁸You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him

the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous.

⁹And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, ¹⁰and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day. ¹¹And you divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters. ¹²By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go. ¹³You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, ¹⁴and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant. ¹⁵You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them.

¹⁶But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. ¹⁷They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. ¹⁸Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, “This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,” and had committed great blasphemies, ¹⁹you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. ²⁰You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. ²¹Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.

²²And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan. ²³You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess. ²⁴So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would. ²⁵And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness.

²⁶Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. ²⁷Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. ²⁸But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies. ²⁹And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. ³⁰Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. ³¹Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

³²Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. ³³Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. ³⁴Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. ³⁵Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. ³⁶Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. ³⁷And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress.

³⁸Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.

This Levitical prayer is comprised of seven basic sections: (1) the acknowledgement and adoration of the transcendent, Creator God of Israel, verses 6-7a, (2) the recollection of God's covenant made with Abraham, verses 7b-8, (3) the mighty acts of God related to the Exodus, verses 9-11, (4) the gracious care and provision of God during the wilderness wandering period, verses 12-21, (5) the fulfillment of God's

promise to give the nation of Israel a homeland, verses 22-25, (6) the cycle of rebellion, punishment, grace, and restoration repeatedly experienced by the people of Israel over and over again, verses 26-31, and (7) the confession of Israel's current sin and need for God's deliverance, verses 32-38.²⁴

The Levites begin their prayer steeped in the language of transcendence in verse 6.²⁵ They pray with a profound sense of adoration of God "whose supreme majesty and omnipotence are acknowledged in the creation, preservation, and government of all."²⁶ He is the one God of the Hebrews. He is the only God. The uniqueness of Israel's God is exemplified in the creation account recorded in Genesis.²⁷ He is distinct from the heavens and the earth because he made the heavens and the earth. God made all things, including humanity.²⁸ Therefore, his relationship with humanity is not to be thought of first as father-child but rather as Creator-creature.

As Creator, God is the rightful owner of all and, as an act of his merciful will, he chooses to preserve his creation (v. 6b). God is neither obliged nor under compulsion

²⁴F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, The New International Commentary on The Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing), 228; and H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 16 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 307.

²⁵This Levitical prayer is also prefaced with words ascribing God's unequivocal transcendence. Neh 9:5 states: "Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, 'Stand up and bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.'" From "everlasting to everlasting" describes God's timelessly eternity and helps to establish the appropriate context of transcendence for the remainder of the prayer.

²⁶R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and D. Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Neh 9:6.

²⁷Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 312.

²⁸*ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 838.

to preserve his creation. However, out of his gracious condescension and creator-ness flows a commitment to sustain and preserve that which he has made.

As Lord, nothing in heaven or on earth can challenge the supremacy of God or contest his rightful place as the sole object of creation's allegiance and worship.²⁹ All of the host of heaven—the celestial bodies as well as all heavenly beings—worship the God of creation who is Lord of all and Lord alone (v. 6c).

The Levites begin the second section of the prayer in verse 7 by recalling God's covenant with Abraham. The phrase "You are the Lord"—a recapitulation of the opening declaration in verse 6—serves to emphasize God's power and greatness in the context of Abraham's call by God and God's covenant with Israel through Abraham. It also highlights the stark difference between the transcendent God and the finitude of Abraham through whom God would fulfill his purposes.³⁰

After the transcendence of God had been firmly recounted and acknowledged, the prayer continues. Both God's transcendence and immanence are expressed through miracles done on behalf of his people as the great Exodus deliverance and wilderness wanderings are recounted. God's mighty acts, an expression of his omnipotence and omniscience, distinguish him from all other gods who have no power. His mighty acts also demonstrate God's sovereign rule as he stands above creation and moves in and with his creation to accomplish his good purposes. At the same time, his mighty acts

²⁹Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 312.

³⁰*Ibid.*

performed on behalf of his people express God's love, care, and concern for his people as he "sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing" (v. 21a).

The Levitical prayer recounts the cycle of sin, rebellion, punishment, and restoration as the Israelites again stood in need of God's forgiveness and deliverance (vv. 26-31). In the final section of this prayer, the Levites once again declare God's transcendent otherness. He is the great, awesome, and all-powerful God of Israel, resplendent in transcendent glory (v. 32a). Yet, he is also the God who is faithful to his covenant with his people and full of steadfast love (v. 32b). Note how verse 32 provides the appropriate contextualization for God's immanent love and covenant faithfulness. The one who chooses to love his people, chooses to be in covenant relationship with his people, and chooses to hear the prayers of his people is none other than the great, mighty, and awesome God of all gods, King of all kings, and Lord of all lords.

This Levitical prayer that inaugurated the reinstatement of the post-exilic temple worship strongly demonstrates the pattern of transcendence then immanence offered in the context of a public worship gathering of the people of God. God's transcendence is appropriately acknowledged first and then continues to provide the proper interpretive framework through which his immanent presence, care, concern, and provision are understood. This prayer contributes to the body of major scriptural data that clearly reveal the rhythm of transcendence then immanence in corporate worship settings. As a potential model for worship service planning, this prayer influences the formulation of a liturgical theology that calls for beginning corporate worship services by recognizing God's transcendence first and then moving to acknowledge his immanent nearness.

God's Transcendent Then Immanent Self-Revelation to Job (Job 38-42)

The book of Job, appearing in the five-book set traditionally called the Wisdom or Poetic Literature of the Old Testament, speaks to the universal issue of suffering. In particular, the book of Job addresses the great mystery of evil, why the wicked prosper, and why bad things often happen to righteous people.³¹ The reader of the book of Job is allowed to see what is hidden from the book's main character. The reader is made privy to God's decision to grant Satan permission to test Job's faith by destroying his possessions, killing his children, and devastating his health. Job was unaware of God's permission granted to Satan to afflict him, God's limitation on the extent of affliction by Satan (Job 1:12; 2:6), and God's ultimate confidence in Job's character and faithfulness (1:8). In all of Job's suffering, he did not sin with his lips, though he cried out in anguish and questioned God's justice. Recognizing God's providential hand in all circumstances both good and bad, Job declared, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (13:15a). Yet, in his suffering, Job challenged God, called the divine sense of justice into question, and demanded a hearing of God. After the lengthy rebukes offered by Job's friends, God finally responded to Job by challenging his inaccurate and limited understanding of God in a set of two discourses sometimes called the "Yahweh speeches" recorded in the following verses in Job 38-41.³²

^{38:1}Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

³¹C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 70.

³²John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 488.

²“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
³Dress for action like a man;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.

⁴Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.

⁵Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?

⁶On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone,
⁷when the morning stars sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

⁸Or who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb,
⁹when I made clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling band,
¹⁰and prescribed limits for it
and set bars and doors,

¹¹and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?

¹²Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,

¹³that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?

¹⁴It is changed like clay under the seal,
and its features stand out like a garment.

¹⁵From the wicked their light is withheld,
and their uplifted arm is broken.

¹⁶Have you entered into the springs of the sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?

¹⁷Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

¹⁸Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
Declare, if you know all this.

¹⁹Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness,
²⁰that you may take it to its territory
and that you may discern the paths to its home?

²¹You know, for you were born then,
and the number of your days is great!

²²Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,

or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,
²³which I have reserved for the time of trouble,
for the day of battle and war?
²⁴What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,
or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

²⁵Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain
and a way for the thunderbolt,
²⁶to bring rain on a land where no man is,
on the desert in which there is no man,
²⁷to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground sprout with grass?

²⁸Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?
²⁹From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the frost of heaven?
³⁰The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen.

³¹Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades
or loose the cords of Orion?
³²Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season,
or can you guide the Bear with its children?
³³Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?
Can you establish their rule on the earth?

³⁴Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
that a flood of waters may cover you?
³⁵Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go
and say to you, 'Here we are'?
³⁶Who has put wisdom in the inward parts
or given understanding to the mind?
³⁷Who can number the clouds by wisdom?
Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,
³⁸when the dust runs into a mass
and the clods stick fast together?

³⁹Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
⁴⁰when they crouch in their dens
or lie in wait in their thicket?
⁴¹Who provides for the raven its prey,
when its young ones cry to God for help,
and wander about for lack of food?

^{39:1}Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?
Do you observe the calving of the does?
²Can you number the months that they fulfill,
and do you know the time when they give birth,
³when they crouch, bring forth their offspring,
and are delivered of their young?

.....

¹⁹Do you give the horse his might?
Do you clothe his neck with a mane?
²⁰Do you make him leap like the locust?
His majestic snorting is terrifying.
²¹He paws in the valley and exults in his strength;
he goes out to meet the weapons.
²²He laughs at fear and is not dismayed;
he does not turn back from the sword.
²³Upon him rattle the quiver,
the flashing spear, and the javelin.
²⁴With fierceness and rage he swallows the ground;
he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet.
²⁵When the trumpet sounds, he says ‘Aha!’
He smells the battle from afar,
the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

²⁶Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars
and spreads his wings toward the south?
²⁷Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up
and makes his nest on high?
²⁸On the rock he dwells and makes his home,
on the rocky crag and stronghold.
²⁹From there he spies out the prey;
his eyes behold it from far away.
³⁰His young ones suck up blood,
and where the slain are, there is he.”

^{40:1}And the Lord said to Job:

²“Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
He who argues with God, let him answer it.”

³Then Job answered the Lord and said:

⁴“Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
⁵I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but I will proceed no further.”

⁶Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

⁷“Dress for action like a man;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.
⁸Will you even put me in the wrong?
Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?
⁹Have you an arm like God,
and can you thunder with a voice like his?

¹⁰Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity;
clothe yourself with glory and splendor.
¹¹Pour out the overflowings of your anger,
and look on everyone who is proud and abase him.
¹²Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low
and tread down the wicked where they stand.
¹³Hide them all in the dust together;
bind their faces in the world below.
¹⁴Then will I also acknowledge to you
that your own right hand can save you.

.....
^{41:9}Behold, the hope of a man is false;
he is laid low even at the sight of him.

¹⁰No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up.
Who then is he who can stand before me?
¹¹Who has first given to me, that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.
.....

God’s lengthy rebuke of Job in this passage contains stunning descriptors of God’s transcendent otherness articulated and detailed by God himself. Job 38:1 sets the stage for understanding God in his transcendent otherness. God’s divine glory was about to be revealed. God speaks to Job out of a whirlwind signaling “a disturbance in the normal course of events, both in the lives of humans and in the course of natural events.”³³ Biblical theophanies are often accompanied by an unusual display of power in

³³David J. A. Clines, *Job 38-42*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 18b (Nashville: Tom Nelson, 2011), 1094.

nature as God revealed his divine glory to mankind. Thunder, dark clouds, earthquakes, and fire often give witness to humans that the presence of God is near in an unusual way.³⁴ This theophany is no exception. God addresses Job from a whirlwind and challenges Job that he must think of God above all else in his transcendent otherness. God reminds Job that he (God) alone is the “master architect of the world,” laid its foundations, and determined its size (38:4).³⁵ He alone was present when the morning stars began to sing (38:7). He alone knows how to superintend his creation. He alone sets the boundaries for the great oceans (38:8-11). He alone has the ability to be all places at all times, even in the depths of the sea (38:16). He alone causes the sun to light the earth and precipitation to fall from the sky (38:22-24). He alone is the source of wisdom and grants understanding (38:36). He alone provides food for every beast of the earth (38:39-41), he alone knows every detail of their existence (39:1-3), and he alone grants strength to the horse and the ability to soar to the birds (39:19-30).

In Job 40, God underscores Job’s powerlessness, his mundane humanness, and his inability to save the wicked (40:9-14). God, with a touch of irony, inquires if Job possessed enough power and majesty to be able to govern and judge the world (40:10). In Job 41, the Lord references the enormous power of the Leviathan—unapproachable and untamable by human strength—and provides a stark contrast between God’s omnipotence and Job’s weakness. The implication is that if Job cannot stand before the

³⁴Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 490.

³⁵Clines, *Job 38-42*, 1135.

enormity of the Leviathan, then he will surely be unable to stand before the counsel of God Almighty to call his justice and ways into question (41:9-10).³⁶

In Job 41:11, Job is schooled by God about divine aseity and authority. God is absolutely independent. He needs nothing. He is never in anyone's debt. Everything in heaven and on earth belongs to him and is dependent on him, not the other way around. God is matchless and in sovereign control over all. All things happen within, not outside of, God's wise governance—including Job's suffering.³⁷

Job, convicted and humbled by God, offers this penitent prayer of response recorded in Job 42:2-6.

²I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
³“Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?”
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
⁴“Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.”
⁵I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
⁶therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.

This prayer demonstrates that Job has been reoriented to the wholly otherness of God. Job acknowledges God as the all-mighty one, able to do all things (v. 2). He admits that he has spoken without proper knowledge or understanding (v. 3), and he repents of his transgression (v. 5).³⁸ In this final prayer, Job acknowledges that no

³⁶Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 534.

³⁷Ibid., 516.

³⁸The descriptor *almighty*, implicitly referenced in Job 40:2, is used of God a total of forty-eight times in the Old Testament and thirty-one times in Job alone, one of which is God's own self-descriptor. *Almighty* appears in the following verses in Job: 5:17; 6:4, 14; 8:3, 5; 11:7; 13:3; 15:25; 21:15,

purpose of God can be thwarted. He recognizes that the almighty power of God and God's absolute sovereignty have no boundaries. Job then takes ownership of his accusation of injustice assailed against God and repents of his sins before his holy, righteous, and just God. Though God never directly answers Job's recurring question, "why does injustice (in the form of suffering) happen to righteous people," God answers Job in a much broader, more universal way. Job's questions are largely egocentric. God's answer to Job, however, is theocentric.³⁹ In reply to Job, God reveals his own transcendence in great detail. God made the universe. God meticulously controls both the physical universe and the moral universe in which justice resides. Man is incapable of unraveling the mysteries of how and why God does what he does. At times, suffering may be a direct result of the cause and effect principle where appropriate and deserved justice is being administered. At other times, however, suffering may have no humanly identifiable cause.⁴⁰ When human reason fails and the human's limited perspective on justice is inadequate, God simply must be trusted and believed that he is transcendentally sovereign over all.

Though the transcendence of God was the major note sounded in the last four chapters of Job, an important implication demonstrated by the interaction between God

20; 22:3, 17, 23, 25, 26; 23:16; 24:1; 27:2, 10, 11, 13; 29:5; 31:2, 35; 32:8; 33:4; 34:10, 12; 35:13; 37:23; 40:2. *Almighty* is the translation for the Hebrew word *Shaddai* in the Old Testament and the Greek word *pantokratōr* in the New Testament and describes the unlimited power of God (*The New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd. ed. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996], s.v. "Almighty"). God who is the almighty one is never regulated by any external force or will. He has the power to do anything he pleases and is infinitely unlimited (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God*, pt. 1, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire [New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004], 522).

³⁹Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, 108.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 109.

and Job is God's immanence. Though God is utterly transcendent, he is also a God who is infinitely and personally involved in the world he created. He causes rain to fall on the earth, food to grow, and the needs of his creation to be satisfied (38:25-27; 39-41). In God's transcendent ubiquity, he appears to Job intimately and personally. He does not leave Job alone forever. Though God does not present humanly satisfying answers to why bad things happen to good people, God presents Job with himself—a response that satisfies Job fully. In God's merciful goodness, he teaches a new way of understanding the created order and God's meticulous attention to and sovereign control over that created order.⁴¹ In the final chapter of Job, God demonstrates his love, care, forgiveness, and provision for Job (42:10-14). The question of justice versus injustice remains unaddressed, but the ultimate goodness of God is on full display for Job to see and enjoy.

Though Job 38-42 is not a prayer in the common form of most biblical prayer, nevertheless, these chapters provide an up-close look at a poignant, instructive dialogic interaction between God and man. Direct personal communications from God are rare in the Bible and are typically only granted to people like Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, making this divine-human discourse stand out all the more.⁴² This passage illustrates decisively the way in which God desires to be viewed, approached, and understood by mankind—first in his transcendent otherness, then in his immanent nearness—and thereby contributes to the development of a liturgical theology that would call for a

⁴¹Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 487.

⁴²Clines, *Job 38-42*, 1094.

worshipping approach to God that first begins by considering God in his transcendent otherness prior to praising him for his immanent nearness.

Isaiah Sees the Lord (Isa 6)

Isaiah was a pre-exilic prophet serving the southern kingdom of Judah around 740-681 BC. The Old Testament book that bears his name centers on God, the Holy One of Israel. As Isaiah received his remarkable call to ministry in the year that King Uzziah died, he recorded one of the most stunning “face-to-face” encounters of worship ever experienced by man.⁴³ The drama of worship recorded in Isaiah 6:1-9a unfolds as follows:

¹In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

⁴And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

⁸And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” ⁹And he said, “Go, and say to this people. . .”

⁴³King Uzziah died in 740 BC.

Isaiah is given an extraordinary vision of divine glory to accompany his call to ministry. In the year of Uzziah's death, Isaiah saw the glory, majesty, holiness, and righteousness of the Lord—concepts that would permeate Isaiah's entire future ministry. His vision of the Lord would change the shape of his life forever.⁴⁴

This passage divides neatly into two parts and remarkably represents the biblical rhythm of transcendence then immanence in worship encounters between God and man. In verses 1-4, divine transcendent majesty is on full display as Isaiah was granted the opportunity to be an eyewitness of the eternal, celestial worship of the God of the ages. Isaiah saw the Lord—an action that the Hebrews believed would precipitate certain death.⁴⁵ Yet, Isaiah lived. He saw God seated on a throne, a throne that was high and lifted up—a throne that transcends all earthly thrones as it stands above them in authority and power. This throne is a throne of glory, which commands worship of its subjects. This throne is also a throne of absolute sovereignty, which commands the obedience of its subjects.⁴⁶ This throne is the resting place of the King of kings. Isaiah's earthly king, Uzziah, had died; yet, this King of glory is timelessly eternal and will never die.

Isaiah notes that the Lord's regal train engulfed the room. This train is symbolic of royalty *par excellence* symbolizing supremacy, beauty, grandeur, and

⁴⁴John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), 176.

⁴⁵John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 24 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 75.

⁴⁶Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 177.

authority incomparable to any earthly king.⁴⁷ The most important aspect, however, is not that the train of the Lord filled the temple but rather that the immensity of the Lord himself filled the temple.⁴⁸ The room is significant also. Usually, the throne of a king is found in a palace. This throne, however, is astonishingly located in the temple, not a palace. This throne is not an earthly throne. This throne represents divine sovereignty like no other throne has ever or will ever represent.⁴⁹

Isaiah's portrait of throne-room worship now turns to the regal attendants—majestic angelic beings each with six wings. With two wings they cover their faces as the light of divine glory and being in the presence of infinite perfection was more than they could bear. “Even the most perfect of creatures dare not gaze brazenly into the face of the Creator. The sight would be too much.”⁵⁰ With two other wings they cover their feet in humble reverence before the Lord. With the final two wings they fly.⁵¹

The angelic chorus of worship proclaims the transcendent holiness of God. They sing the song of God's holiness, the same song that will be repeated again in the book of Revelation. Isaiah records the angelic exclamation of the thrice holy God. In Hebrew, the single repetition of a word would express superlative significance. However,

⁴⁷Bruce A. Ware, “Avoid the ‘Rush’ to Immanence: Beholding the God of Majesty and (Then) Mercy” (chapel address presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, August 27, 2013), accessed June 26, 2014, <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/chapel/avoid-the-rush-to-immanence-beholding-the-god-of-majesty-and-then-mercy/>.

⁴⁸Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 178.

⁴⁹Ware, “Avoid the ‘Rush’ to Immanence.”

⁵⁰Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 179.

⁵¹Ware, “Avoid the ‘Rush’ to Immanence;” and Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1089.

the tripartite expression *kadosh, kadosh, kadosh* (holy, holy, holy) used in Isaiah was the ancient way of describing not only an exceptional quality, but also an unmatched superlative quality. He is the most holy of all. No other being could justly be ascribed this title. This threefold *holy*, often referred to as the Trisagion, is the strongest form of superlative in Hebrew.⁵² It describes the inconceivable uniqueness of God and the unmatched distinctiveness of his absolute moral purity. As the Holy One of Israel, a title used for God twenty-eight times in the book of Isaiah, God is utterly distinct and set apart from the physical world and the fallen world.⁵³ There is no one like God. He is holy.

He is not only holy, but he is the thrice holy Yahweh *Sabaoth*, sometimes rendered “Lord of Hosts” and at other times rendered “Lord Almighty.”⁵⁴ The God of Isaiah’s vision is omnipotent. He commands the armies of the heavens; the earth is his footstool. He is a mighty warrior King, the majestic supreme commander-in-chief who alone is worthy of worship.

In verse 3b, the angels continue their shouts of worship exclaiming, “The whole earth is full of his glory!” To speak of God’s glory is to declare his stunning importance, his unmatched worth, or his supreme significance. *Glory* (Hebrew, *kavod*; Greek, *doxa*) is related to the verb “to be heavy” and is often used throughout Scripture to refer to his weightiness or the splendor, brightness, and majesty of God.⁵⁵ The “glory of

⁵²Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 181.

⁵³Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 43.

⁵⁴*HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), s.v. “Names of God in the Hebrew Bible.”

⁵⁵Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 181n.

the Lord” also often refers to the manifestation of God’s astonishing presence. To sing of God’s holiness, the angels declare his absolute uniqueness and infinite perfection. To sing of God’s glory is to say that God “is preeminent in existence and that the whole universe is filled with evidence of his importance and sublimity.”⁵⁶ Their declaration of God’s holiness and glory is so loud, so robust, so penetrating, and so unconstrained that the very foundation stones of the temple shake.⁵⁷

As the angels cry out in worship, the temple becomes engulfed in smoke (v. 4). Scripture often associates smoke with the transcendence of God, the moral purity of God, the presence of God, and the greatness of God. No doubt, the smoke depicted in Isaiah 6 indicates the numinous presence of God. Yet, the smoke here is also being generated by an altar of burning coals introduced in the second half of verse 4. The altar is being used to prepare the coals for the purification of Isaiah’s sinful lips. Hence, the smoke represents the infinite purity of God who cannot abide in the presence of sin.⁵⁸ In addition, the smoke perhaps is also provision for Isaiah’s protection to mediate the terrifying and potentially deadly presence of the utter holiness of God.

In verse 5, this passage makes a shift from the transcendent to the immanent. Isaiah, engulfed in the presence of God, is suddenly and painfully aware of himself and his sinful condition. Isaiah responds to the holiness of God with the only possible response of a sinful creature whose eyes have seen the infinite holiness of the King, the Lord of Hosts. He who had been pronouncing woe on others for their rebellion now

⁵⁶Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 48.

⁵⁷Ware, “Avoid the ‘Rush’ to Immanence.”

⁵⁸Ibid.

pronounces woe upon himself. Isaiah exclaims, “Woe is me!” followed by the exclamation rendered in the KJV, “I am undone.” Isaiah comes to clearly understand the enormity of his ruined sinful life only when he sees God in his greatness, majesty, and transcendent fullness.⁵⁹ “For the finite, the mortal, the incomplete, and the fallible to encounter the Infinite, the Eternal, the Self-existent, and the Infallible is to know the futility and the hopelessness of one’s existence.”⁶⁰ Isaiah is utterly undone and completely incapable to do anything about his sinfulness. He confesses his pitiful state and acknowledges his desperate need. He is unclean, a ruined sinner, and he lives among a generation of people who are equally ruined (v. 5). The sin of Adam is epidemic. All have it—every person of every generation.

In response to Isaiah’s repentance, God does something remarkable—something that he is not obliged to do. God is never obligated to show mercy and extend grace to any member of sinful humanity. Yet, God in his immanent loving kindness and gracious tender mercy provides the remedy for Isaiah’s sinful condition. One of the angels ministering to God around the throne is temporarily reassigned to be a messenger of God’s grace to Isaiah. With a burning coal, one of the angelic beings touch the impure lips of Isaiah, and he is made clean (vv. 6-7). Isaiah had not asked to be cleansed. He only confessed his impurity. God, in his mercy, initiates Isaiah’s purification, forgiveness, and restoration. The consuming fire of God’s righteousness cleanses Isaiah’s lips and Isaiah’s heart from which his lips spoke. God did not have to do this.

⁵⁹Ware, “Avoid the ‘Rush’ to Immanence.”

⁶⁰Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 182.

God chose to do this.⁶¹ Isaiah's iniquity is taken away and his sin forgiven. He is now ready to be commissioned into the service of the Lord.

Isaiah 6 is a remarkably strong and clear example of the rhythm of transcendence then immanence. Isaiah saw the Lord in all of his transcendent splendor and glory! It would not be for another eight hundred years that God would reveal through the Apostle John the full identity of who it was that Isaiah saw. Yes, Isaiah indeed saw the Lord. However, Isaiah experienced not a theophany but a Christophany! As previously discussed in chapter 6, John made clear in John 12:41 that the one whom Isaiah saw was the pre-incarnate second person of the Trinity—the one who would later come to ransom his own life for the forgiveness of all those who, like Isaiah, would repent and believe.⁶² Isaiah saw Christ in all of his resplendent glory! It was Christ who took away his sin and Christ who prefigured his own redemptive act that would occur eight hundred years later on the cross of Calvary.

This passage in Isaiah 6 has captured the fascination of Christians for centuries. God in his infinite wisdom has provided for us a scene and sequence of worship that he has ordained, designed, orchestrated, and recorded for all time. This dialogic interaction begins boldly with the revelation of God in his utter transcendent otherness. He is the God who is the most holy of all, the sovereign one, the exalted one, the all-powerful one, the one whose glory fills the temple and indeed the entire universe. Then, and only then, does the worship scene move from viewing God in his transcendent otherness to

⁶¹Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 183-84.

⁶²Ware, "Avoid the 'Rush' to Immanence."

understanding God in his immanent nearness. Though God is totally separate and distinct from people, his love and compassion are on full display as he personally does for Isaiah that which Isaiah cannot do for himself. God graciously and benevolently cleanses him from his unrighteousness and then gives his life meaning and purpose. The biblical rhythm of understanding God in his glorious transcendence first and then in his compassionate immanence second is strongly supported by this passage in Isaiah and can serve as an appropriate template for worship planning—a template that is highlighted in appendix 6 and 7.

Worship in the Eschaton (Rev 4-5; 19)

Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully explore every aspect of worship described and defined in John's vision recorded in Revelation, I will focus on six key prayers of worship contained in two specific scenes—the throne in heaven (Rev 4-5) and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19). First, I will provide a brief context. The author of Revelation is Jesus Messiah himself writing through John the Apostle (Rev 1:1). John, near the end of his life while on the island of Patmos, was allowed to witness a kaleidoscope of events to come at the end of days when that which has been inaugurated by Christ's first advent would come to a final consummation through Christ's second advent. John penned the sights, sounds, and dramatic scenes unveiled to him of the final judgment and defeat of sin, evil, and Satan. He wrote of the coming of the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven, the establishment of Christ's royal reign over all of heaven and earth, and the final consummation of the Bride, the church, with Christ at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. He described the re-creation and reclamation

by the last Adam, Christ, of that which was lost by the first Adam and painted an astonishing portrait of the eternal, uninterrupted, unencumbered worship that will ensue as the redeemed of every nation and every tongue worships the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb throughout all eternity.

Revelation offers vivid insight into worship in the eschaton. Jesus proclaims his transcendent otherness in Revelation 1:8 when he states that he is the “Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” These first words of Jesus recorded in Revelation establish his transcendent otherness, his equality with the divine, his eternality, and his omnipotence. As the Alpha and the Omega, he is the first and the last. This declaration harkens back to the words of God the Father, the King and Redeemer of Israel, spoken in Isaiah 44:6: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.” In claiming the position of Alpha and Omega, Jesus was declaring that he is the beginning point for all of history and the Creator of all that exists. As the Omega, he is the culminating point of all creation, the ultimate goal of history that has been moving toward the climactic point of the consummation of Christ and his Bride, the Church for which he gave his life.⁶³ As the one “who is and who was and who is to come,” Christ claims the attribute of timeless eternality, a transcendent quality belonging only to that which is uncreated, God himself. As sovereign Lord, Christ is the almighty one possessing the same power as God the Father Almighty.⁶⁴ Christ is unlimited in ability. He commands all of the armies of heaven. As the almighty one, he can do

⁶³*ESV Study Bible*, 2463.

⁶⁴*Pantokratōr* meaning *almighty* appears in the book of Revelation nine times emphasizing the ultimate supremacy and power of God over evil (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1977], 73).

anything he wills to do, including bringing human history into existence and to its final end by fully and finally defeating sin, Satan, death, and evil.⁶⁵ This passage is a poignant reminder not only that Christ was transcendent before his incarnation but also that he remains transcendent throughout all of eternity.

After Christ's declaration of his transcendent divinity, John records a stunning and terrifying picture of Christ in heaven that bears great similarity to the apocalyptic writing of Daniel 7.⁶⁶ John vividly describes Jesus in Revelation 1:13b-16 as

¹³ . . . one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

Here, John sees Christ as a supernatural being but in the form of a human—incomparable embodied divinity. He is none other than God, robed in regal splendor. On his royal throne, he reigns as the righteous judge of the earth because he is the transcendentally holy and sinless one, just like God the Father.⁶⁷ His white hair indicates that he is the Ancient of Days, full of infinite wisdom. His flaming eyes are able to penetrate to every secret place of man's heart and mind. He sees all. He knows all. Nothing is hidden from Christ. His feet are ready to engage in the battle of the ages, the defeat of Satan and every form of sin and evil. His voice is thunderous with authority; his Word, the Gospel of Truth, will accomplish its purposes. In his hand, he holds the

⁶⁵G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 199.

⁶⁶Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 77-78.

⁶⁷Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 478.

church represented by the seven stars. They belong to him and are in his sovereign control.⁶⁸ The glorious righteousness of Christ illuminates all of heaven with radiance and brilliance. This same brilliance and radiance had once before been witnessed by John on the Mount of Transfiguration where Christ's face "shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light" (Matt 17:2b). The sheer majesty of this terrifying scene causes John to fall down at the feet of Christ as though he were dead (Rev 1:17).

The throne room in heaven. These opening verses in Revelation 1 set the stage for a remarkable glimpse of what worship is actually like in heaven. John speaks in chapter 4 of an open doorway in heaven leading to the very throne room of God. The throne and much of the details of worship recorded in Revelation 4 harken back to the throne room scene in Isaiah 6. In both accounts, the throne symbolizes the absolute sovereignty and kingly reign of God.⁶⁹

As Christ beckons John to enter the throne room of God, John records this worship scene and worship song of heaven offered to the Lord by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4:8b:

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!

Notice that the exclamation of praise offered by the heavenly assembly begins by declaring who God is in his transcendent otherness. The sequence is important. Worship is first a response to the recognition of who God is. Who God is defines,

⁶⁸Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 179.

⁶⁹Ibid., 134.

clarifies, and magnifies what God does on behalf of his people. This heavenly group of elders and creatures is ceaselessly engaged in the declaration of who God is in his transcendent otherness. This God of heaven is the same thrice holy God revealed in Isaiah 6 with the same declaration of God’s holiness being declared then. He is infinite in purity and arrayed in holiness. This assembly praises God for his infinite and transcendent power. They echo and rehearse what Christ had already revealed about himself in Revelation 1:8—that he is infinitely powerful and unstoppable by any thing or any one in heaven or on earth. He is the Lord of hosts, the all-mighty God, *kyrios theos pantokratōr*.⁷⁰

Then, this opening declaration of Christ’s glorious transcendence is expanded to ascribe his eternal timelessness. He is the one “who was and is and is to come.” He is “supra-historical.”⁷¹ Christ was, Christ is, and Christ always will be. Christ is in no way limited by time nor can he be measured in time.⁷² Christ dwells in eternity, but time dwells in Christ.⁷³ Christ is before, after, and above all things, including time.⁷⁴ Christ, the one slain before the foundation of the world, lives and lives eternally. It is as if the angels are declaring, “his holiness and omnipotence stretch from eternity to eternity.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰*Kyrios theos pantokratōr* is Greek for Lord, God Almighty.

⁷¹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 333.

⁷²Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1:286.

⁷³A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), 39.

⁷⁴Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:620.

⁷⁵Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 139.

John continues to review the worship scene in heaven and observes the four living creatures and elders falling down in worship before Christ seated on the throne (v. 10). As the elders lay down their own crowns in worship to Christ, they continue to offer this prayer of worship recorded in Revelation 4:11:

¹¹Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.

Here, the creatures and elders are shown in continual ascription of praise as they declare the ultimate worth and value of God both with their words and with their posture of worship. God is infinitely glorious, infinitely honorable, and infinitely powerful. God is infinitely worthy to be praised, but the worshipers are infinitely unworthy to offer praise in a manner commensurate with the incomparable majestic excellencies of the King of kings and Lord of lords.⁷⁶ Scripture is careful to note the worship posture of those singing this portion of the song of heaven; they bowed—a physical demonstration of profound reverence, humility, and submission to God’s regal authority.⁷⁷

In the second half of verse 11, the creatures and elders declare the reason that God is worthy of worship. The preposition “for” can be rendered “because” and indicates a causal relationship. God is worthy because he is the originator and source of all things and by his will, all created things came into existence on his ordained timetable.⁷⁸ As Creator, he has authority to rule over all that he created. As the elders

⁷⁶Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2471.

⁷⁷*ESV Study Bible*, 2470.

⁷⁸Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 140.

and creatures bow in worship, their posture is a poignant reminder that an ontological distance and distinction exists and always will exist between the Creator and those who have been created, even in heaven.⁷⁹

The heavenly throne room scene continues with the appearance of Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, and the only one worthy to open the scroll of God. He appears as a living Lamb, standing, but bearing the marks of his crucifixion (Rev 5:6). As Christ approaches God the Father to take the scroll⁸⁰ from his right hand, the creatures and elders again fall down in worship of Christ, singing this new song of worship recorded in Revelation 5:9b-10:

^{9b}Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
¹⁰and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.

The elders and creatures celebrate in worship and praise of the eternal one, the omnipotent one, the almighty one, and the sinless one—the transcendent Christ—who is worthy to open the scroll because he had purchased with his own blood the right to redeem his church and to eternally judge the wicked. Here, the song of worship with Christ’s transcendence always in full view (see Rev 1:8) is a song of redemption focused on Christ’s immanent provision and ransom for those whom he rescued from the penalty

⁷⁹Rob Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 219.

⁸⁰The scroll may contain the will of God that is to be executed, the covenant of God that contained blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, or simply God’s purposes of the consummation of history. Whatever its contents, the scroll could not be fully disclosed and opened by any creature, only the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world (*ESV Study Bible*, 2470).

of sin and death.⁸¹ Because of Christ's suffering, the bondage of sin and the sting of death are obliterated for all those who had placed their faith and trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross. His blood transforms the church into a kingdom of priests (5:10) endowed with the ability to worship God and reign with him as the old heaven and old earth give way to the new heaven (see also Rev 21:1, 4).

Then, John becomes aware of the song of the throng recorded in Revelation 5:12—myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands shouting:

¹²Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!

The heavenly throng exclaims the excellencies of Christ. Here, Christ is depicted both as the immanent Lamb, Redeemer of his church, and as the transcendent God of wonder who is worthy of man's highest praise, deepest affection, strongest allegiance, and uncompromised obedience. The thousands-voice choir attests to Christ's wealth; he owns all things because he created all things. Christ is perfectly wise. He is infinite in power. He is supremely honorable because he is sinlessly perfect. He is glorious in majestic splendor. He is co-equal with God and co-eternal with God. He is worthy of every word of blessing and honor and glory that a creature can produce.

Next, the worship scene climaxes as every creature in heaven and every creature on earth and under the earth join the heavenly chorus declaring in Revelation 5:13:

¹³To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!

⁸¹Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 148.

This verse is the fulfillment of Philippians 2:9-11, which states, “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Universal acclamation of praise to God the Father who sits on the throne and to Christ the Son, the Lamb slain, now risen, is expressed here by all creation without exception.⁸² God and the Son are worshiped in their co-equal, co-eternal, co-infinite transcendent glory. As a result, John records that the awestricken elders fall down and worship. Amen.

The marriage supper of the Lamb. The last example of a song of worship offered to God recorded in Scripture occurs in Revelation 19:6b-8. It is the song of a great multitude thunderously roaring like rushing water saying:

^{6b}Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.
⁷Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
⁸it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure. . .

This final song is a beautiful comingling of thoughtful reflection and praise of the Divine in both his transcendent glory and his immanent nearness. The scene referenced here is called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, a time of consummation of Christ with his Bride—the Church. The imagery of the wedding feast harkens back to the Old Testament metaphors of betrothal, marital faithfulness, and intimacy between God

⁸²Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 150.

and his people. This scene is also reflective of Paul's imagery of the marriage union of Christ and his church recorded in Ephesians 5:23-24.⁸³

Notice the order of this final exclamation of worship recorded in Scripture. This shout of praise begins with the recognition that the transcendent God of the universe is none other than "God the Almighty." No one compares to his greatness. His strength and power are beyond human comprehension. In absolute power, he reigns supreme. His authority is irresistible. His control is absolute. His throne is never-ending. His dominion is inescapable, and his sovereignty is without rival. He is the one whom the psalmist extolled, "Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty!" As the multitude shout, they rejoice and exult and give him glory (19:7).

Finally, this worship scene shifts from the transcendent toward the immanent. Marriage, intimacy, relationship, union, and communion now come into full view. The redeemed church of Christ has been made ready to unite with Christ fully and personally without the barricade of sin and the guilt of sin. She is clothed in white linen, pure and bright. Her blood-washed garments have been bathed by the very blood of Christ himself. Christ is ready to present her fully cleansed "to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph 5:27). Now, "the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Rev 21:3). The prophecy of Hosea 2:20, "I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD," is fulfilled.⁸⁴ "The kingdom of the world

⁸³Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 494-95.

⁸⁴Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 939.

has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15b). Satan is defeated. The bride is redeemed, unhindered communion is returned, and Paradise lost is restored.

I offer one final thought before leaving this worship scene in Revelation. The union and communion of Christ with his bride in no way nullify, diminish, or eliminate Christ’s transcendent otherness. Though intimately immanent in this final worship scene with his bride, Christ still remains fully transcendent. Though united with Christ, the bride does not become divine or transcendent. Using the marriage metaphor, Christ is not simply her husband; he is first and foremost her Lord and her King. For this reason, the bride is not called into a union of two equals. She is compelled to bow her knee to worship because Christ remains the transcendent King of glory from everlasting to everlasting.⁸⁵

Each worship scene revealed in the eschaton strongly demonstrates the rhythm of transcendence then immanence. John has recorded for the church these glimpses of eternal worship in heaven that significantly contribute to the development of a liturgical theology that would suggest a specific ordering of transcendence then immanence coupled with a specific functionality of transcendence providing the interpretive framework and appropriate context for God’s glorious immanence to be properly understood. When the proper order is observed and the proper context is established, God is most fully understood and, therefore, most completely magnified in and through the worship of believers.

⁸⁵Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 494.

The Rhythm of Transcendence Then Immanence Represented in Significant Prayers of the Bible

The personal and corporate encounters with God examined in the preceding paragraphs clearly present a pattern of thinking about God first in his transcendent otherness and then in his immanent nearness. In the paragraphs that follow, I will examine significant biblical prayers most often offered outside of a corporate or face-to-face worship encounter with God that demonstrate an almost identical replication of the transcendence then immanence pattern previously described. Prior to this exposition, however, I will briefly address why the pattern of transcendence then immanence exemplified in personal prayers should be considered as substantive data that support the fundamental assumption of this thesis, namely, that the formulation of liturgical theology should be influenced not only by corporate and individual worship encounters with the Lord (e.g., worship at Mount Sinai, worship in the eschaton, Isaiah's encounter with the Lord) but also by the shape and patterns that can be discerned through the examination of personal prayers offered to God. The following paragraphs will briefly demonstrate why worship and prayer may be considered complementary and at times synonymous activities. If a degree of congruence between the concept of prayer and the concept of worship can be established, conclusions drawn from one may then be applied to the other.

Apologetic for the Collective Consideration of Worship and Prayer

Prayer and worship share many distinct similarities. At its heart, prayer is dialogic communication with God. God initiates. Believers speak. God speaks. Prayer is not a one-way stream of demands, requests, or thoughts. Prayer is the conversation between believers and their God. Likewise, worship is dialogic. The dialogic rhythm of

revelation and response governs the reality of all Christian worship. God in gracious condescension reveals himself, his nature, his character, his plan, and his word. Believers then respond in worship to the glorious and infinite God of wonder for who he is and for the mighty acts that he performs on behalf of his creatures.

In prayer God is “adored in his consummate holiness and glory.”⁸⁶ Prayer expresses reverence and awe of the thrice holy God, the God of the ages. He is the high and exalted one. He is crowned in glory. Heaven is his throne room. Earth is his footstool. Likewise, worship adores the one who was and is and is to come. Worship sings of the glory of God, shouts of the majesty of God, and bows in awe of the holiness of God.

Prayer communicates the creature’s dependence on God as Creator. Prayer is not the interconnection of two equal beings. Prayer is the connection between the Infinite and the finite, between the Omnipotent and the weak, between the Independent and the needy. Biblical prayer acknowledges the creatures’ desperate dependence on almighty God,⁸⁷ the need for mercy and grace in the midst of failure, the need for help in times of trouble, and the need for love that is unmerited and undeserved. The prayer of the dependent acknowledges God’s sovereign reign and rule over all things and the creature’s inability to control anything at all. In the same way, worship acknowledges the creature’s utter and complete dependence upon God, confessing his mighty power, his kingship, and his reign over all things. In prayer, believers dependently lean upon God. In worship,

⁸⁶B. M. Palmer, *Theology of Prayer as Viewed in the Religion of Nature and in the System of Grace* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1980), 20.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 15.

believers voice belief in the sufficiency of God to meet their every need (cf. Phil 4:19; Acts 17:28).

In prayer, the soul assumes the appropriate posture of kneeling before God. In the words of theologian B. M. Palmer, the “prostration of the soul in humanity before God is essentially prayer. It is an acknowledgement, in the very frame of the spirit, that the great and dreadful God stands in amazing contrast with the feebleness of the creature who, therefore, abases himself before the majesty which it is yet his joy to approach.”⁸⁸ Likewise, the posture of the worshiper is humbled awe, wonder, and meekness before the greatness and glory of God.

In prayer, the sinking soul finds rest in the Lord. In worship, the weary and wounded heart cries out to the Lord and finds rest (cf. Pss 57; 108). In prayer, the sinner, crushed under the weight of sin, exclaims, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13b). In worship, the guilt-ridden soul cries out, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps 51:1). In prayer, the repentant soul rejoices as God’s grace and mercy are extended to forgive sins and to cleanse from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). In worship the heart rejoices in God’s faithfulness as sinners plunged beneath the blood of Christ have the guilty stains of their sin washed away (Ps 51:7; Isa 1:18).⁸⁹ In prayer, the divine glory is contemplated and encountered. In worship, the divine glory is celebrated and responded to.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Palmer, *Theology of Prayer*, 18-19.

⁸⁹William Cowper, “There Is a Fountain,” in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 224.

⁹⁰Palmer, *Theology of Prayer*, 317-24.

Prayer is exclusively the language of private worship and covers the spectrum of adoration, confession, praise, lament, thanksgiving, and supplication.⁹¹ Likewise, prayer provides the language of corporate worship to express the same.⁹² Admittedly, New Testament corporate worship contains elements that are not strictly considered prayer.⁹³ For example, preaching, communion, and the “kiss of peace” are not prayers, per se. Corporate worship can also include elements of speaking to one another in “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” that take the form of songs about God rather than songs prayed to God. However, in a broad sense, private worship and corporate worship both find their essential and primary locus of execution in prayer—the dialogic communion with God.

Is there any biblical support for equating worship and prayer or, at the very least, seeing prayer and worship as complementary activities? Yes. In both the Old and New Testaments, prayer and singing praise are portrayed as closely related. Paul records

⁹¹This statement was made in an impromptu conversation concerning the nature of worship and prayer by Donald S. Whitney, Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean of the School of Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 2014.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Believers know from the New Testament epistles that the worship of the early Christian church contained the following elements borrowed from their Jewish worship practices offered in the synagogue: (1) Scripture lections (1 Tim 4:13; 1 Thess 5:27; Col 4:16), (2) Psalms and hymns (1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16), (3) Common prayers (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim 2:1-2), (4) Amens said by the people (1 Cor 14:16), (5) A sermon or exposition (1 Cor 14:26; Acts 20:7), (6) Confession of faith—not necessarily the recitation of a creed (1 Cor 15:1-4; 1 Tim 6:12), and (7) Possible almsgiving (1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 9:10-13; Rom 15:26). In the New Testament, a picture of early Christian worship begins to emerge in the epistles. In addition to the Jewish synagogue elements listed above, New Testament worship distinctives include: (1) Prayers offered to Jesus (and to God through Jesus), (2) Grace benedictions, (3) Invocations and confessions of Jesus, (4) Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs celebrating the work of Jesus, (5) Prophetic revelation, (6) Baptism, and (7) The Lord’s Supper (William D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship: Its Development and Forms* [London: Oxford University Press, 1936], 4-5; and Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999], 74-94).

these words in I Corinthians 14:15, “I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.” As Paul instructs the church in Corinth concerning corporate worship practices, he treats the act of praying and the act of singing praise as virtually identical. Likewise, James juxtaposes prayer and singing praise in James 5:15 where he writes, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.” The psalm writers regularly refer to their song lyrics as prayers (cf. Pss 17:1; 39:12). Psalm 90 is specifically titled, “A Prayer of Moses,” even though all psalms were likely meant to be sung (or chanted) expressions of worship.⁹⁴ In Psalm 42:8, the Sons of Korah write:

⁸By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

In each instance, the Scripture writers seem to use singing praise (an expression of worship) and prayer as interchangeable, strongly related concepts.

Essentially, prayer is the language of worship as worship is expressed through prayer—at times sung, at other times spoken; at times shouted, at other times whispered; at times expressed with great joy, at other times expressed with tears. Prayer is the means by which God provides for the finite to approach the Infinite.⁹⁵ Likewise, worship is the means designed by God for creation to approach, love, and adore its Creator. In essence, worship is the continuing dialogue of prayer. It is both the personal conversation between God and the human creature (private worship) and the conversation between

⁹⁴T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 129-30.

⁹⁵Palmer, *Theology of Prayer*, 26.

God and the human community (corporate worship).⁹⁶ Prayer provides the language of worship as worship provides the wings of prayer. Don E. Saliers in *Worship as Theology* states, “So far as the glory of God is acknowledged in praise and thanksgiving, and biblical prayer speaks of ascribing to God the honor and blessing appropriate to God’s holiness and to the mystery of God’s being, we may speak of liturgy as prayer.”⁹⁷

For the reasons outlined above, one can rightly state that prayer and worship share many fundamental characteristics and in many cases are essentially the same. Therefore, the study of prayer provides transferable insight into the practice of worship and, thus, into the formulation of liturgical theology that governs worship praxis and design.

The next segment of this chapter will specifically examine thirteen major prayers in the Old and New Testaments plus the Psalms collectively to discern specifically the biblical rhythm of acknowledging God in his transcendent otherness and then recognizing God for his immanent care and provision. These will include significant prayers of Israel’s kings, prayers of the prophets and other Old Testament figures, the Song of Moses, the sung prayers recorded in the Hebrew Psalter, New Testament prayers, and the prayers of Christ. At the end of the examination of these prayers, I will then explore several biblical examples of prayers that implicitly rather than explicitly demonstrate the model of transcendence then immanence.

⁹⁶Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 223.

⁹⁷Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 85.

Prayers of the Kings

King David. David—the shepherd, musician, poet, and king—holds the unique scriptural description of being a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22) who found favor in the sight of God (Acts 7:46). He also possesses a unique place in messianic prophecy being the root of Jesse through which the promised Messiah would come. A citizen of Bethlehem, David tended sheep for his father, Jesse, prior to being anointed by the prophet Samuel to be Israel’s second king. David desired to honor God and build the temple of the Lord for him in Jerusalem. However, God would not allow David to build the temple because he had been a man of war. Instead, the building of the temple would be the privilege of David’s son, Solomon. Near the end of his life, David gathers God’s people together to give offerings to build the temple, tenders a charge to Israel and to Solomon, and then prays this final prayer recorded in 1 Chronicles 29:10b-22:

¹⁰ . . . Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever.

¹¹ Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. ¹² Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. ¹³ And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name.

¹⁴ But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.

¹⁵ For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. ¹⁶ O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. ¹⁷ I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you. ¹⁸ O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you. ¹⁹ Grant to Solomon my son a whole heart that he may keep your commandments, your testimonies, and your statutes,

performing all, and that he may build the palace for which I have made provision.

The rhythm of transcendence then immanence is initiated as David begins his prayer by acknowledging the transcendent eternity of God. Leslie Allen noted that David “ransacks the theological dictionary” to find appropriate terms to describe the unmatched greatness and power of his transcendent God.⁹⁸ David’s God, the timelessly eternal one, lives “forever and ever” (v. 10). David acknowledges in verse 11 the glory of God expressed through his eternal magnificence and omnipotence. The God of Israel is unmatched in supremacy and boundless in power. David continues by declaring God’s majesty, kingly reign, and sovereign ownership over all that he has created in heaven and earth. God’s kingdom and authority are absolute. He is the “supreme head and ruler in his kingdom.”⁹⁹

David recognizes that God—the ruler and creator of all—is the ultimate source of all wealth and honor (v. 12). Even Israel’s great offerings brought to build the temple were inspired by the grace of God and came ultimately from the hand of God (vv. 14b, 16).¹⁰⁰

David continues to ascribe God’s transcendent and providential control over all things. He alone distributes power and fame among those he created (v. 12b). He holds ultimate authority and can choose to build up or tear down, to make great or to humble, to exalt or to destroy. In comparison to the greatness of God, David confesses his smallness

⁹⁸Leslie C. Allen, *1, 2, Chronicles*, The Communicator's Commentary, vol. 10 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 191.

⁹⁹Martin J. Selman, *1 Chronicles*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 10 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 269-71.

¹⁰⁰Selman, *1 Chronicles*, 270.

when he queries in verse 14, “who am I, and what is my people” that they should be able to offer anything to the Lord?¹⁰¹ Implied in his question, “who am I,” is the well-understood answer: nothing. David is fully aware of his own stature in light of God’s grandeur. David acknowledges his smallness and desperate need for God. David recognizes that, though he was king of Israel, God is the ultimate source and owner of all things.

David calls on the providential control of God in verse 18 to direct Israel’s heart to always be toward the Lord. Then, once David has firmly established the transcendence of God as the foundation for his own understanding of God, he goes on to ask that God—the immanent covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—would allow Solomon to follow God faithfully and build his temple.

David’s prayer offers a strong example of worship in the assembly that begins by first acknowledging God in his transcendent otherness, rehearsing God’s transcendent attributes, and then moving to the recognition of God’s immanence. David’s prayer is an exemplary prototype of the rhythm of transcendence then immanence in his approach to and understanding of God. It serves as a model for worshipers in every age.¹⁰²

King Hezekiah. Hezekiah was the fourteenth king of Israel’s southern kingdom, Judah. He ascended the throne of leadership at age twenty-five and ruled for twenty-nine years. Hezekiah is noted for reestablishing pure temple worship practices, reaffirming the covenant between God and his people, reestablishing the Passover

¹⁰¹David asks this same question—“who am I?”—at the beginning of another of David’s great prayers recorded in 1 Chronicles 17:17.

¹⁰²Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, 198.

celebration, and destroying idolatrous practices in his kingdom.¹⁰³ Scripture records that Hezekiah trusted the Lord and that the Lord was with Hezekiah and caused him to prosper (2 Kgs 18:5-7). With neighboring Assyria threatening to attack Jerusalem, Hezekiah offered this prayer to the Lord that demonstrates the rhythm of transcendence then immanence:

¹⁵O Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. ¹⁶Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. ¹⁷Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands ¹⁸and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. ¹⁹So now, O Lord our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone. (2 Kgs 19:15b-19)

Hezekiah begins his prayer by acknowledging and rehearsing the transcendent attributes of God. Hezekiah's God is not of this world. He is a ruling and powerfully reigning sovereign who sits on a kingly throne (v. 15a). He is enthroned "above the cherubim," a reference to the most holy place within the temple. Only the most holy King of the universe could occupy the holiest of places in the temple. In verse 15b, Hezekiah proclaims the transcendent uniqueness of Yahweh who is not only a god, but the one and only God. All other gods—including the gods of the Assyrians—are lifeless, dead, and powerless because they were fashioned by the weak hands of sinful man (v. 18). Only Yahweh is God, the living God. Only Yahweh is sovereign over all of the kingdoms of the earth.

¹⁰³*New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Hezekiah."

Next, Hezekiah acknowledges God's transcendence as Creator (v. 15c). All of heaven and earth find their origin and source in God. As the Creator God, Yahweh is unequalled and incomparable. As Creator, God's power stands above all other powers of the world. No greater power exists in heaven or on earth.¹⁰⁴

After God's transcendence is acknowledged, then Hezekiah petitions God for his immanent provision and appropriation of his strength and power to defeat the Assyrian commander, Sennacherib (v. 19a). This request, God graciously grants.

Hezekiah's prayer strongly models the biblical pattern of transcendence then immanence as he rehearses the transcendent attributes of God prior to asking him for aid or provision. It is Hezekiah's profound understanding of God's wholly otherness that gives him the boldness and confidence to then ask God for a miraculous display of power that will show to all the kingdoms of the earth who the great and mighty God of Israel really is (v. 19b).

King Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat served as the fourth king of Judah in the pre-exilic era from circa 870-848 BC.¹⁰⁵ Though imperfect, he is considered to be one of Judah's good kings. Scripture records the affirmation that Jehoshaphat was one who "sought the Lord with all his heart" (2 Chr 22:9b). He sought to cleanse Judah from idolatry and sent out priests and Levites to instruct the people in the law of the Lord (2 Chr 17:7-9). During much of Jehoshaphat's reign, Judah enjoyed peace, prosperity, and the blessing of God.

¹⁰⁴T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 13 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 278; see also 283.

¹⁰⁵*ESV Study Bible*, 622.

Early in Jehoshaphat's ascendancy, the Moabites gained independence from Israel, formed a coalition with neighboring tribes, and set out to attack Judah. Scripture records the gathering of God's people to ask for help from the Lord. In fact, 2 Chronicles 20:4 states that people from every Judean city came to seek the Lord. In the midst of this great assembly of people gathered together in the temple in Jerusalem, Jehoshaphat led the community of God's people in this prayer, a prayer of national lament recorded in 2 Chronicles 20:6-12:¹⁰⁶

⁶O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you. ⁷Did you not, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? ⁸And they have lived in it and have built for you in it a sanctuary for your name, saying, ⁹"If disaster comes upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before you—for your name is in this house—and cry out to you in our affliction, and you will hear and save." ¹⁰And now behold, the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy—¹¹behold, they reward us by coming to drive us out of your possession, which you have given us to inherit. ¹²O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

Jehoshaphat opens his prayer by acknowledging God's transcendent distinction from his people. He asks the rhetorical question in verse 6a, "are you not God in heaven?" The implied response to this question: a resounding yes! God is in heaven; man is on earth. God is not of this world nor can he be contained by any structure built by the hands of man. God transcends all physical parameters of creation. He is located above and beyond the mundane. He is in heaven; he is other-worldly. He is not of this earth. His dwelling place is celestial, not earthly.

¹⁰⁶Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 443.

Next, Jehoshaphat prays in verse 6b, “you rule over all the kingdoms and nations.” Here, he recognizes God’s universal sovereignty over all of the powers of the earth and God’s ability to control and direct the story of mankind in any way he chooses. Then, Jehoshaphat acknowledges in verse 6c God’s transcendent omnipotence. All earthly powers pale in comparison to God’s limitless power. Nothing can hinder the will of God. God possesses the ability to accomplish everything that he wills with effortless speed and unhindered determination. God’s power is boundless and unstoppable.

After establishing the transcendent character of God who is other-worldly, all-powerful, and sovereignly reigning over his creation, Jehoshaphat recalls God’s previous deliverance of his people and asks God to hear their prayers, to provide for their deliverance, and to rescue them from the invading Moabite coalition. Jehoshaphat’s prayer ends with this heart-felt declaration of faith: “we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” (v. 12b). This concluding phrase expressing both desperation and trust is recognition of Judah’s utter weakness in light of God’s boundless strength.¹⁰⁷ God is pleased to answer this prayer; he promises to deliver Judah from the hands of the invading army.

King Jehoshaphat’s prayer models well the biblical pattern of transcendence then immanence as the appropriate approach to God in prayer and worship. As a response to the transcendent God of the universe’s answer to their prayer, this scene of worship is recorded: “Then Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshiping the Lord.

¹⁰⁷Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 445.

And the Levites, of the Kohathites and the Korahites, stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice” (2 Chr 20:18-19).

King Solomon. Solomon, the second son of David through Bathsheba, served as the third and final king of Israel’s united kingdom. Solomon presided over a time of great peace and prosperity for the people of God. He reigned for forty years from circa 971-931 BC.¹⁰⁸ Solomon is most noted for the building and dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. He is also known for his prayer to God for wisdom to rule his people righteously. This dialogue between God and Solomon is recorded in 1 Kings 3:5-14:

⁵At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” ⁶And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. ⁷And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. ⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?”

¹⁰It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. ¹²Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. ¹³I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. ¹⁴And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.”

This dialogue between God and Solomon commences with God’s self-revelation in two distinctly transcendent ways. First, God demonstrates his omnipresence

¹⁰⁸*ESV Study Bible*, 599.

through appearing to Solomon in his dreams (v. 5a). God's ubiquity has no boundaries. His presence inhabits every part of creation. Even the mind and thoughts of a man are places to which God's presence has total access. God's presence is inescapable (Ps 139:7-12). Second, God reveals himself as all-powerful. God invited Solomon to "ask what I shall give you" (v. 5b). Implied in God's invitation to Solomon is God's transcendent omnipotence. God is fully capable of answering any prayer that Solomon could conceive. No request is outside the capability of God.¹⁰⁹ God has no limitations, no boundaries, and no restrictions. God is not in the least concerned that Solomon could ask for something that he could not produce or accomplish.

Solomon references God's covenant with David (v. 6) and then confesses the sovereignty of God over all events—namely, the establishing of David's throne as well as the establishment of Solomon's own throne (vv. 6b-7a). Solomon recognizes God's meticulous, detailed orchestration of historical events and acknowledges God as the ultimate source of all earthly power and kingships.¹¹⁰

In verse 7, Solomon confesses his smallness in light of God's greatness and the enormous assignment given to Solomon to be king of the people of God. Then, Solomon prays for a "wise and discerning" heart. Solomon's prayer tacitly acknowledges God as the transcendent, omnisapient one. God possesses all knowledge and infinite wisdom. God alone knows the best ends, and he alone knows the best means to accomplish the best ends. He is not only all-wise, but he is also the source of all wisdom.

¹⁰⁹Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 12 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 52.

¹¹⁰House, *1, 2 Kings*, 110.

In answer to Solomon's prayer, God promises not only to make him incomparably wise beyond any other human leader but also to grant him riches, honor, and a long life in exchange for faithful covenant obedience (vv. 13-14). God's covenant loyalty extends from Abraham to Moses to David and now to Solomon.¹¹¹ God's transcendentally unchanging character and faithfulness to his spoken word assures Solomon that God was with him.

At the end of this dialogic encounter, Solomon responds in worship. Scripture records that Solomon got up from his dream, came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord in worship (1 Kgs 3:15). God had revealed himself transcendentally. God then reveals and offers himself to Solomon immanently. Solomon responds in worship. This dialogic prayer between God and Solomon is a strong model for transcendence then immanence in biblical encounters between God and man. God is everywhere at all times. God is all-powerful and the source of all power. God is all-wise and the wellspring of all wisdom. God is gloriously and transcendentally other than his people. Yet, God's covenantal love, presence, and blessing belong to those who are faithful and obedient to his word. The ultimate and necessary human response to God's revelation of himself is worship.

Prayers of the Prophets and Other Old Testament Figures

Jeremiah. Jeremiah, dramatically called by God to be a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah, served for approximately forty years during the reign of the

¹¹¹Ibid., 111.

last five kings of Judah until the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.¹¹² These forty years were marked by political, social, financial, moral, and spiritual decay of the people of God. Sometimes called the weeping prophet, Jeremiah dramatically called on God's people to repent of their covenant infidelity and return their hearts and allegiance back to God lest they fall under the judgment of the living God.

Though Jerusalem was about to fall into the hands of the Babylonians and his people exiled to a foreign land, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to buy a field, a symbolic gesture of the promise that, one day in the future, Israel would return to this land where they would again build houses, buy fields, and plant vineyards (Jer 32:14). After the field was purchased, Jeremiah prayed this prayer to the Lord recorded in Jeremiah 32:17-25:

¹⁷Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. ¹⁸You show steadfast love to thousands, but you repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them, O great and mighty God, whose name is the Lord of hosts, ¹⁹great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the children of man, rewarding each one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds. ²⁰You have shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all mankind, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day. ²¹You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror. ²²And you gave them this land, which you swore to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey. ²³And they entered and took possession of it. But they did not obey your voice or walk in your law. They did nothing of all you commanded them to do. Therefore you have made all this disaster come upon them. ²⁴Behold, the siege mounds have come up to the city to take it, and because of sword and famine and pestilence the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it. What you spoke has come to pass, and behold, you see it. ²⁵Yet you, O Lord God, have said to me, "Buy the field for money and get witnesses"—though the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans.

¹¹²The last five kings of Judah were Josiah (640-609 BC), Jehoahaz (609 BC), Jehoiakim (609-598 BC), Jehoiachin (598-597 BC), and Zedekiah (597-586 BC).

Jeremiah clearly initiates the rhythm of transcendence then immanence by first declaring the greatness of God who is to be understood as nothing less than the Creator, originator, source, architect, designer, and maker of the earth and the cosmos in its entirety. Jeremiah's confession clearly articulates the Creator-creation distinction. Because God is Creator, he is also owner. As Creator, God is incontestably sovereign and rightly exercises regal dominion over all that he owns. God's sovereignty is a meticulous sovereignty since there is no detail on heaven or on the earth that escapes his intentional and purposeful will.¹¹³

Then, Jeremiah continues by acknowledging God in his transcendent wonder. "Nothing is too hard for you" (v. 17). God's transcendent attribute of omnipotence is in full view here. God has infinite power and incomparable strength to do anything that he wills to do.¹¹⁴ His power represented by his outstretched arm is limitless (v. 17). He is the Almighty one who can bring about anything he pleases.¹¹⁵

After a brief recognition of God's immanent and steadfast love extended to thousands (v. 18)—a covenantal expression of immanence assured by his transcendent immutability—Jeremiah immediately continues to acknowledge God's transcendent otherness. Jeremiah's God is great and mighty. His name is "Lord of Hosts" who

¹¹³Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 97.

¹¹⁴Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 12 (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 155.

¹¹⁵Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 2:13.

commands of all of the forces and power that operate throughout creation. He is the invincible commander-in-chief of celestial armies.¹¹⁶

Jeremiah concludes his survey of God's transcendent attributes by stating that God is all-wise (great in counsel), is all-powerful (mighty), and has infinite knowledge. Nothing is hidden from God whose watchful eyes discern all of the ways and deeds of man (v. 19)—a concept echoed by the author of Hebrews: “No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:13).

Jeremiah's prayer then recounts the care of the Lord for his people demonstrated by his deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Yet, Israel's covenant infidelity elicits God's subsequent judgment for their disobedience. Jeremiah ends his prayer with the hopeful expectation that, one day, Israel would be restored to her homeland. Though God would assuredly punish Israel, God reminds Jeremiah of his transcendent omnipotence recorded in Jeremiah 32:27: “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?” God would indeed restore Judah (Jer 32:36-44).

Jeremiah's prayer is a strong model of the biblical pattern of prayer that begins with the ascription of praise to the transcendent greatness of God prior to asking God for his immanent expressions of protection, rescue, or provision.¹¹⁷ As Jeremiah approached the Lord, the rhythm of transcendence then immanence is in full view.

¹¹⁶*HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Lord of hosts.”

¹¹⁷J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 591.

Daniel. Daniel served as one of Judah’s major prophets beginning circa 605 BC and extending through the exilic period. Scripture primarily depicts Daniel as a deported Jew living as an ethnic and religious minority in Babylonian exile.¹¹⁸ He was a remarkable interpreter of dreams and was miraculously protected when thrown into the lions’ den as a punishment for failing to obey the royal edict to worship Darius, King of the Chaldeans.¹¹⁹

Early in the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams so troubling that he was rendered an insomniac. Though no one else could interpret his dreams, God miraculously gave Daniel the revelation of interpretation. In response, Daniel prayed the following prayer recorded in Daniel 2:20-23:

²⁰Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.
²¹He changes times and seasons;
he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding;
²²he reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what is in the darkness,
and the light dwells with him.
²³To you, O God of my fathers,
I give thanks and praise,
for you have given me wisdom and might,
and have now made known to me what we asked of you,
for you have made known to us the king's matter.

Daniel starts his prayer with a blessing of the God who is transcendentally immortal and timelessly eternal. The word rendered *blessed* in the ESV can also be

¹¹⁸John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 30 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 44.

¹¹⁹*New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Darius.”

translated as *praise*.¹²⁰ Note that Daniel is encouraging perpetual praise be offered to the name of God. “The name of God”—a reverential substitute for “Yahweh”—represented the person of God and “all that is gloriously true of him.”¹²¹

Daniel continues to contemplate God’s wholly otherness by referencing God’s omniscience and omnipotence (v. 20b). Unlike man who may possess limited wisdom in narrow arenas, God is universally wise, and his unlimited power enables him to apply wisdom to accomplish in the very best way anything that he desires to accomplish.¹²² All human wisdom and understanding is derivative in nature, a revelation of God and not a product of human realization.¹²³

In verses 21-22, Daniel continues to celebrate God’s uniqueness. God is sovereign over the events and periods of human history; he is able to direct them or change their course at will.¹²⁴ He distributes and establishes power as he pleases and is the ultimate source of human wisdom and knowledge. The implication here is that God is sovereign over powerful empires; he inaugurates and deposes kings as he pleases.¹²⁵ The most powerful kings on planet earth, including the powerful King Nebuchadnezzar, received their power, authority, and permission to exercise their power and authority

¹²⁰Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 18 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 86.

¹²¹Goldingay, *Daniel*, 47; and Leon J. Wood, *Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 60.

¹²²Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:511.

¹²³Goldingay, *Daniel*, 55.

¹²⁴Miller, *Daniel*, 87.

¹²⁵*ESV Study Bible*, 1582.

from God alone. In addition, he is in sovereign control of all natural phenomena, including controlling the seasons.

Daniel concludes his portrait of God's transcendence by acknowledging that God's knowledge is infinite and exhaustive. Nothing is or can ever be hidden in darkness, for God's light reveals even the deep and hidden things of man. Note the language of "deep, hidden, and darkness" in verse 22. This imagery is indicative of things hidden from finite humanity but fully perceived by the all-knowing mind of God who brings all things into the light.¹²⁶

Then, after acknowledging God for who he is in his transcendent otherness, Daniel thanks God for his immanent and personal provision of the revealed mystery of the king's dream. Here, the prayer turns very personal in verse 23. Daniel praises the "God of my fathers"—a phrase indicative of personal intimacy. In addition, the personal pronouns referencing God change from third person "he" to second person "you" indicating a much more intimate approach to God.¹²⁷ Daniel realizes that it was none other than the great God of his fathers who had divinely imparted understanding and insight into his mind.

This prayer of Daniel is one of adoration and thanksgiving. Daniel first praises his God who is transcendently glorious. Then, Daniel thanks his God for his personal provision of wisdom and insight into the king's matter (v. 23b). Daniel's prayer provides

¹²⁶Miller, *Daniel*, 87.

¹²⁷Ibid.

a strong model of the biblical rhythm of transcendence then immanence, which shapes his expression of gratitude offered to God in an extremely personal worship setting.

Isaiah. Isaiah, one of the most quoted Old Testament prophets by New Testament writers, was called by God to voice divine warnings and judgment against the wickedness of Judah for despising and rejecting “the Holy One of Israel” (Isa 1:2-4). Isaiah served during the pre-exilic period under five different kings of Judah beginning circa 740 BC and concluding around 681 BC. Isaiah’s prophecy contained stern admonitions about the coming punishment by God of his people for their covenantal unfaithfulness. While declaring impending judgment, Isaiah’s prophecy also pointed expectantly to a time when God would deliver and restore his people through a righteous branch from the “stump of Jesse”—Messiah, the Son of God (Isa 11:1-10).

Woven throughout the prophecies of Isaiah are some of the most poignant descriptions of God in his transcendent, wholly otherness. In Isaiah 66, God declares that his throne is in heaven and the earth is his footstool. He proclaims that he alone is the creator and source of all things (Isa 66:2). Isaiah exclaims that God is the almighty one, the Holy One of Israel, whose immensity is so great that the waters of the earth can be held in the hollow of his hand and that the weight of the mountains is like dust on his scales (Isa 40:12, 15). Also, the stunning portrait of God painted by Isaiah includes a God who is above and beyond his creation, whose incomparable power creates and sustains the universe, who never tires, and whose days are everlasting (Isa 40:22-28). Isaiah’s God is majestic and glorious, arrayed in splendid apparel, and marching in great strength; his mighty acts can only be described as “wonder upon wonder” (Isa 29:14; 63:1). His power is terrifying (Isa 10:33), and his purposes and plans will assuredly

come to pass (Isa 14:24). Isaiah 8:13 records this command steeped in a profound understanding of God's transcendence: "But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" (Isa 8:13). With this portrait of his transcendent God in full view, Isaiah pleaded on behalf of God's people this lament and complaint recorded in Isaiah 63:15-64:12:

¹⁵Look down from heaven and see,
from your holy and beautiful habitation.
Where are your zeal and your might?
The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion
are held back from me.
¹⁶For you are our Father,
though Abraham does not know us,
and Israel does not acknowledge us;
you, O Lord, are our Father,
our Redeemer from of old is your name.
¹⁷O Lord, why do you make us wander from your ways
and harden our heart, so that we fear you not?
Return for the sake of your servants,
the tribes of your heritage.
¹⁸Your holy people held possession for a little while;
our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary.
¹⁹We have become like those over whom you have never ruled,
like those who are not called by your name.

^{64:1}Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence—
²as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at your presence!
³When you did awesome things that we did not look for,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
⁴From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him.
⁵You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.
Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?
⁶We have all become like one who is unclean,

and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

We all fade like a leaf,

and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

⁷There is no one who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.

⁸But now, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

⁹Be not so terribly angry, O Lord,
and remember not iniquity forever.

Behold, please look, we are all your people.

¹⁰Your holy cities have become a wilderness;
Zion has become a wilderness,
Jerusalem a desolation.

¹¹Our holy and beautiful house,
where our fathers praised you,
has been burned by fire,

and all our pleasant places have become ruins.

¹²Will you restrain yourself at these things, O Lord?
Will you keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?

Isaiah's prayer rapidly moves from transcendence to immanence several times.

He initiates his plea by acknowledging God's lofty place of transcendence above the earth.¹²⁸ Isaiah implores God to "look down from heaven," the celestial dwelling place of God (v. 63:15a). Throughout Scripture, biblical authors used terms like "look down," "heaven," "high," and "above" to indicate that God is not of this world. The dwelling place of the God of the Hebrews is not of this world because God himself is not of this world. God's eternal home is heaven. Though God's ubiquity is infinite, heaven is a unique place where the glory of his manifest presence is present in a special way. God's

¹²⁸This prayer is also prayed in light of the mighty power of God expressed earlier in Isa 63:1-6 (John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998], 611).

heaven is a “better country” (Heb 11:14), an eternal kingdom (2 Pet 1:11), and the high and holy dwelling place of God (Isa 57:15). In heaven, the angelic hosts may be found attending to and celebrating the holiness of God in perpetuity.¹²⁹ Heaven is a sin-free place where the brilliance of God’s glory illuminates so profoundly that there is no need for the sun or moon to shine (Rev 21:23). God reigns in heaven and hears his people from heaven (2 Chr 7:14).

Isaiah continues in verse 63:15 with a description of heaven as being God’s “holy and beautiful habitation.” The word rendered in the ESV as *beautiful* is the Hebrew word *tipharah* that can also be translated as *glorious*, *glory*, or *splendor*.¹³⁰ Therefore, verse 63:15 could rightly be stating that heaven is a beautiful place adorned with the glorious splendor and radiant majesty of God’s transcendent holiness.

The tenor of Isaiah’s prayer in this instance, however, does not revere God’s heavenly dwelling as beneficial to God’s people but rather as destructive. Isaiah is disturbed that God in his transcendent otherness had separated himself totally from his people as a punishment for their rebellion. Isaiah begins to plead with God not to stay hidden, not to ignore their plight, not to stay separated, and to have compassion on their sin-sick state of rebellion. Isaiah recalls to God in verse 63:16 that his people call him Father and Redeemer, imagery that invokes the understanding of God’s nearness, care, and love for his creation.

¹²⁹Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1209.

¹³⁰*New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*, ed. Robert L. Thomas (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, 1998), s.v. “*tipharah*,” Logos Bible Software.

Comingled images of God's transcendence and immanence follow throughout the remainder of this prayer of lament and complaint. Isaiah acknowledges the absolute sovereignty of God over the affairs and hearts of man (v. 63:17). He laments the destruction of their land and their sanctuary, the Temple (vv. 63:18-19), and asks how God could allow it to remain in ruins (v. 64:11).

Once again, Isaiah acknowledges God's celestial dwelling place and implores God to leave his place in heaven and to deliver his people from their adversaries. He recalls the powerful manifestations of God's presence to previous generations—mountains quaking and fire burning (vv. 64:1-2)—and longs for God's presence to return again.

Isaiah declares God's transcendent otherness once more in verse 64:4. God is incomparable. Israel's God is matchless, uncontested, and unparalleled.¹³¹ Israel's God is the Holy One, the King of all kings, and the Lord of all lords. No one has ever heard or seen such a God as Yahweh. He is truly in a category all to himself. None can compare with him.

Isaiah confesses the people's inability to change their own hearts apart from God's merciful intervention. He reminds God that "he is the one who brought Israel into existence, and they are now in misery and shame."¹³² He asks God to mercifully return, change their hearts, forgive their sins, and redeem their helpless estate (v. 64:9).

¹³¹Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, 622.

¹³²Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, 628.

Isaiah's prayer of lament strongly represents the biblical pattern of transcendence then immanence, albeit in a unique way. Though Isaiah repeatedly acknowledges God in his transcendent otherness, he begs God not to remain separated, detached, and aloof from the people who call him Father. God's transcendence without his immanent care, concern, provision, and protection yields desperation and misery on the part of the people of God. This prayer is a poignant reminder that the complementary concepts of God's distinction from humanity and God's nearness to humanity are both necessary for believers to fully understand the God they worship.

Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a Jewish exile serving in the distinguished position of cupbearer to Artaxerxes I, King of Persia (circa 465-424 BC). Nehemiah is credited with leading the effort to rebuild the deteriorating city of God, Jerusalem, especially its crumbling walls. Upon receiving the news of the failing walls of his beloved homeland's capital city, Nehemiah wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed the following prayer recorded in Nehemiah 1:5-11:

⁵O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. ⁸Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, "If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, ⁹but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there." ¹⁰They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. ¹¹O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.

This prayer has a simple structure. It is comprised of an extended invocation, an appeal for God to hear, a confession of sin, an appeal to covenant promises, a supplication for God's people, and finally a plea for personal success as Nehemiah approached the king to ask permission to leave his service and return to Jerusalem.¹³³ It combines a personal request for his upcoming audience with the king with a confession of the current sinful state of Israel.¹³⁴

Though his prayer was ultimately a cry for help, Nehemiah does not begin his prayer by expressing his need. Instead, Nehemiah grounds his prayer decisively in the arena of God's transcendence. His first words were, "O Lord God of heaven" (v. 5a). Nehemiah acknowledges that his God is other-worldly. He does not belong to the created order called earth. His God is high, above, up there, or out there. Nehemiah's God is the Lord, sovereign King of heaven. In beginning his prayer in this way, Nehemiah appropriately reorients his own point of view, helping him to examine his circumstances and his God from a heavenly perspective, not an earth-bound orientation.¹³⁵

Next, Nehemiah continues in transcendence as he describes his God as one who is both great and awesome (v. 5b). The word *greatness* refers to the incomparable excellencies of God's nature, attributes, and actions, which elicit awe and wonder from his people.¹³⁶ God is great in power, great in wisdom, great in righteousness, and great in

¹³³Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 167; and Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 155.

¹³⁴Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 172.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶*Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*, ed. Martin H. Manser, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), s.v. "Greatness."

glory. *Awesome*, a much overused and misapplied word in twenty-first century America, could be translated as *awe-inspiring*, *to fear*, or *terrifying*. *Awesome* refers to that which elicits an array of commingled emotions, including fear, respect, and honor.¹³⁷ As applied to God, the term embraces the concepts of reverential fear and wonder. This is the God Nehemiah worships. This is the God to whom Nehemiah prays.

After confessing the transcendent nature of God, Nehemiah begins to think about God in his covenant nearness. The God of Israel is a God of love, one who hears the prayers of his children and one who forgives the repentant sinner. Near the end of his prayer, Nehemiah returns briefly in verses 8-9 to recalling the enduring, immutable, transcendent nature of God's word. God's word once spoken cannot change. His promises never fail. His word, just like his character, is immutable and, therefore, supremely trustworthy. Nehemiah asks God to remember his promise to Moses to re-gather his repentant people—the people redeemed by God's mighty power and outstretched hand (v. 10). Finally, Nehemiah closes his prayer by asking for God's nearness, success, and mercy as he approaches the king for permission to leave his service to rebuild the city walls of Jerusalem (v. 11).

Some theologians have called special attention to the way Nehemiah ends his prayer. Nehemiah asks God to allow him to find favor in the eyes of King Artaxerxes I. However, instead of addressing him with a title of royalty as the social convention of the time would have dictated, Nehemiah refers to Artaxerxes as “this man” in verse 11a. Was this a sign of disrespect? Was this an inadvertent oversight? I believe neither of

¹³⁷*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.v. “Awe, Awesome.”

these assessments provides the correct motivation. Instead, the most compelling explanation is that Nehemiah is showing his heavenly orientation to an earthly power. Artaxerxes is a powerful Persian king, a man of considerable influence, and a man who could grant life or require death. However, from Nehemiah's perspective, it is the transcendent Lord, the God of Israel, who providentially controls the destiny of man and who meticulously orders the details of human history.¹³⁸ With this understanding, Nehemiah ends his prayer squarely back in the arena of the transcendent.

Nehemiah clearly models the rhythm of transcendence then immanence in prayers to God. The context of this prayer seems to indicate that this is a personal expression of worship to God rather than a prayer being led in a corporate setting. It provides strong support for the development of a liturgical principle that would call for initially orienting worship toward the transcendence of God, which would then provide the appropriate perspective and framework for understanding the immanence of God.

Ezra. Ezra was a priest and a scribe who led the second wave of returning exiles from Babylonian captivity home to Jerusalem circa 459 BC. His role as a skilled scribe made him knowledgeable of and conversant with the law of Moses (Ezra 7:6). Ezra was instrumental in reestablishing Jewish religious practices and, steeped in Deuteronomic tradition, a proponent of the strict observance of the law. Ezra discovered that, while in exile, the Jewish people had broken God's law against interracial marriage. He led the newly repatriated Jews in repentance and in separation from their non-Jewish

¹³⁸Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 157.

wives and children.¹³⁹ Ezra grieved over God's holy and chosen race being compromised.

In sorrow, he prayed this prayer on behalf of the covenant community of God at the

evening sacrifice recorded in Ezra 9:6-15:

⁶O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. ⁷From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt. And for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as it is today. ⁸But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery. ⁹For we are slaves. Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.

¹⁰And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, ¹¹which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, "The land that you are entering, to take possession of it, is a land impure with the impurity of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations that have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness. ¹²Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever." ¹³And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this, ¹⁴shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape? ¹⁵O LORD, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this.

Ezra's prayer is both a confession as well as a didactic homiletic intended to bring about the response of Israel's leaders recorded in Ezra 10. The prayer follows the sequence of invocation, confession of sin, acknowledgement of exile as the punishment

¹³⁹*ESV Study Bible*, 817.

for sin, gratitude for the Lord's favorable influence on the Persian kings, confession of the sin of intermarriage, and a final doxology to God.¹⁴⁰

Ezra opens this prayer of confession by using the formal name God rather than Lord. This approach indicates a focus on God's transcendent authority, sovereignty, and absolute rule over his creation and his people. He then moves immediately in verses 6b-7 to acknowledge the holiness of God in light of the unholiness of his people. Holiness is the quintessential mark of God's transcendent otherness. Holiness is the "summary designation of all that God is and is known to be in contrast to all of creation."¹⁴¹ Holiness describes the terrifying reality of God's moral purity.¹⁴² In recognition of the unholiness and impurity of the returning Jews from exile, Ezra acknowledges shame, embarrassment, and guilt over their sins. Ezra's posture of prayer is specifically recorded in verse 5: "And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God." Ezra's posture of kneeling represents humility in the face of holiness. His spread hands to the Lord signify desperate need and dependence.¹⁴³

After an initial confession and acknowledgement of exile as punishment for Israel's sin, Ezra in verse 9 begins to focus on the immanent expression of God's steadfast love extended to his people, which enabled them to return home and to repair

¹⁴⁰Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 128.

¹⁴¹Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 45.

¹⁴²David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 124.

¹⁴³Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 133.

the temple. Then, Ezra confesses the sins of intermarriage—the action that put the uniqueness and distinction of God’s people, the effectiveness of God’s work, and the purity of God’s word at risk.

Ezra’s prayer culminates with a return back to the transcendent. He declares in verse 15, “you are just.” Some translations render this phrase as “you are righteous.”¹⁴⁴ This expression acknowledges the transcendent holiness of God, his righteousness, and his utter privilege to condemn that which is sinful. Ezra concludes that sinfulness cannot stand in the presence of holiness. His penitent prayer before a transcendently holy God is offered in weeping and self-abasement (Ezra 10:1).

In the chapter that follows, Ezra records the response of Israel to the revelation of God’s holiness and his expectation for Israel’s holiness. Scripture records that a great many men, women, and children gathered together, wept bitterly, and repented of their sin (Ezra 10:1). They sought the Lord’s forgiveness and pledged to reenter into covenant with the Lord (Ezra 10:3).

Ezra’s prayer offers a model of how the rhythm of transcendence then immanence shapes penitent corporate expressions of worship. Both his prayer posture and the prayer itself demonstrate the necessary understanding of God’s transcendent holiness and God’s expectation of holy and obedient living of his people as the essential foundation for immanent, covenant fellowship between God and his people.

¹⁴⁴Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 137.

Prayer in Song: Moses and the Psalms

The Song of Moses. Moses is introduced in Scripture as a Hebrew baby born during a time of great oppression of Israel by the Egyptian Pharaoh. Exodus records this edict of Pharaoh, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live” (Exod 1:22). Soon after his birth, Moses was hidden in the bulrushes for protection to be divinely discovered by Pharaoh’s daughter who drew him out of the water and raised him in the royal court of Egypt. As Moses grew, his affinity for his enslaved and suffering people increased. As an adult, he avenged the beating of a Hebrew by killing the Egyptian perpetrator. Fearful of Egyptian retribution, Moses fled to Midian where he married and became a shepherd. Yet, back in Egypt, the bondage of the Hebrew slaves by the Egyptians continued to grow increasingly oppressive and harsh. Cries for mercy and deliverance by the Hebrews touched the heart of God who heard their groaning.

God chose Moses and spoke to Moses from a burning bush that would not be consumed by the fire. In the presence of transcendent holiness, Moses hid his face in fear (Exod 3:6). God charged Moses, saying: “I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt” (Exod 3:10). Though Moses was hesitant, he finally acted in obedience. With his brother Aaron, Moses under the command and power of God directed Pharaoh to free God’s people. After many refusals coupled with the judgment of God through ten catastrophic plagues on the Egyptians, Pharaoh finally freed Israel from enslavement and sent them out of Egypt. The emancipated people of God were led through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Encamped by the Red Sea, the eyes of Israel looked up to see the Egyptian army

in full pursuit led by Pharaoh whose heart was hardened. Trapped by the Red Sea, the people of God responded in fear. Nonetheless, Moses said to them, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent” (Exod 14:13-14). Then, God parted the waters of the Red Sea and caused the seabed to be dry. All Israel passed through unharmed to the other side of the sea. As the Egyptians pursued Israel into the parted Red Sea, the Lord caused the waters to return and drown all of the chariot riders and horsemen; indeed, “of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained” (Exod 14:28). The Scripture records that Moses and the people of Israel sang this song of praise to the Lord in Exodus 15:1-18:

¹I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

²The Lord is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.

³The Lord is a man of war;
the Lord is his name.

⁴Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea,
and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea.

⁵The floods covered them;
they went down into the depths like a stone.

⁶Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power,
your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.

⁷In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries;
you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble.

⁸At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up;
the floods stood up in a heap;
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

⁹The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake,
I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them.

I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.’

¹⁰You blew with your wind; the sea covered them;

they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

¹¹Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

¹²You stretched out your right hand;
the earth swallowed them.

¹³You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed;
you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

¹⁴The peoples have heard; they tremble;
pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia.

¹⁵Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;
trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;
all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

¹⁶Terror and dread fall upon them;
because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone,
till your people, O Lord, pass by,
till the people pass by whom you have purchased.

¹⁷You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain,
the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode,
the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.

¹⁸The Lord will reign forever and ever.

The above prayer has been traditionally called the “Song of Moses” and is perhaps the most ancient song of praise to God known to man.¹⁴⁵ In actuality, it is both the song of Moses and the song of the people of Israel sung to the Lord. Though this sung prayer of worship and celebration initially seems to follow a pattern of immanence followed by transcendence, it is in actuality a great example of transcendence followed

¹⁴⁵Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 116. The Song of Moses is similar to other Old and New Testament songs offered to God in response to specific events that have occurred in human history. Songs like the Song of Deborah and Barak offered in response to military victories, Hannah's song offered as a result of God's deliverance from sterility, Mary's song offered in response to God choosing her to be the mother of Jesus, and Zechariah's song in response to the birth of John the Baptist all respond to specific events that reveal the transcendent nature of the character of God. Each of these songs, though not explicitly demonstrating the pattern of transcendence then immanence, are contextually songs offered in response to the transcendent power, might, sovereignty, and providence of God. Hence, each prayer/song can rightly be considered to demonstrate the biblical pattern of praying and worshiping that understands God's transcendent otherness first followed by acknowledging God's immanent love, care, provision, and deliverance offered on behalf of his people (*ESV Study Bible*, 168).

by immanence. Context provides greater clarity in discerning why this prayer is offered to the Lord and why it truly models the pattern of transcendence then immanence.

The context is this: the people of God had just witnessed the transcendent might of their God in a way that few had ever personally observed. Israel was spared the curse of death brought on by the tenth plague on Egypt. Freed to leave Egypt by God, they were led and protected by him through a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Trapped by the Red Sea with the threat of annihilation by the pursuing Egyptian army, Israel was saved by the almighty power of God's right hand, which obliterated the host of Pharaoh's pursuing army.

The contextual reference point for the "Song of Moses" is summarized by the verses immediately preceding in Exodus 14: "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses" (Exod 14:30-31). These verses paint an almost unimaginable scene. The people of God, escaping in fear from the ruthless pursuit of the Egyptian army, suddenly see with their own eyes the Egyptian corpses washing up on the seashore. The mighty power of God, providence of God, and sovereignty of God were on full display. He rules all of the rulers on earth. Nothing can thwart the will of God. All the powers of the earth are no match for the infinite power of the almighty God. Transcendence and wholly otherness were in full view for every Israelite to see with their own eyes. In response, they sang, they worshiped, and they praised the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who had triumphed gloriously and had thrown the horse and rider into the sea. This song, the "Song of Moses," therefore, is

indeed a song of response to the God of wonders who revealed his transcendent otherness through the mighty works he performed on behalf of his people.

At the center of this song, verse 11 stands as a summary declaration of God's incomparable uniqueness.¹⁴⁶ After the recounting of God's miraculous acts of deliverance and protection of his people, Moses harkens back to the transcendent otherness of God as he muses rhetorically, "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (v. 11). Implied in Moses' initial question is the singularity and incomparability of God amid the pantheist world of Egyptian false gods.¹⁴⁷ God is one God. God is the only God. All other earthbound false gods are nothing in comparison to the one true God. No one compares to him. No power compares to him. No authority compares to him. No wisdom compares to his wisdom. He is boundless. He is illimitable. He is unrivaled and unsurpassed. He is utterly unique. It is a confession by Moses of God as unparalleled and transcendent.¹⁴⁸

In the second half of verse 11, Moses declares that the Lord is "majestic in holiness." *Majestic* refers to the regal nature of God and his attributes. The Lord of the Hebrews is the God of majesty, glorious in splendor.¹⁴⁹ Throughout Scripture, the word *majestic* is often used to describe God in his transcendent otherness. God is robed in

¹⁴⁶Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 103.

¹⁴⁷John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 207.

¹⁴⁸Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 116.

¹⁴⁹The Hebrew word for *majestic* is sometimes translated *glorious*.

majesty (Ps 31:1). His name is majestic (Ps 8:1). His voice roars and thunders with majesty (Job 37:4). His presence is surrounded by majesty (1 Chr 16:27). Majesty belongs to God (1 Chr 29:11), and Moses recognizes this majesty of his God.¹⁵⁰

Moses also recognizes and acknowledges the holiness of his God. Holiness is the attribute of God that perhaps best defines his character and nature like no other descriptor. Holiness is the attribute that the seraphim declared in Isaiah 6, and this same holiness caused Moses to hide his face in fear at the burning bush. For an expanded description of the transcendent holiness of God, please refer to chapter 4 of this dissertation.

The final portion of the prayer anticipates the challenges to come as Israel began its conquest of the Promised Land (vv. 13-17). Moses closes his prayer with a confident statement about God's eternal reign. The rule and authority of the God of the Hebrews have no end (v. 18). He alone is the timelessly eternal one. No earthly power and no earthly authority can ever usurp God's infinite power and ultimate authority. He alone rules over the sea, Israel, Pharaoh, and the nations.¹⁵¹ God's throne will last forever.

The great Exodus of Israel is the single most important salvific event recorded in the Old Testament. Its significance provides the bedrock upon which most of Judaism would be founded. In addition, this event is also the Old Testament's foreshadowing of the great emancipation of the people of the New Covenant as Christ's atoning sacrifice

¹⁵⁰*Dictionary of Bible Themes*, s.v. "Majestic."

¹⁵¹House, *Old Testament Theology*, 104.

set free those in bondage to sin and sin's penalty. The "Song of Moses," which exalts the God of the Hebrews and commemorates the great Exodus, is a vivid expression of the biblical pattern of transcendence then immanence captured in the biblical prayers and songs of his people. To Moses, God's words and actions are revelation, and his song a response. To later readers, however, this very song of response has become a part of God's revelation of himself to all subsequent people of God.¹⁵² Therefore, the "Song of Moses" contributes well to a liturgical theology that employs both the dual rhythms of revelation/response and transcendence/immanence to shape a modern approach to God in worship.

The prayers of the Psalter. The book of Psalms is a collection of liturgical verse, prayers, and songs comprising a corpus of liturgical worship expressions originally used by the Hebrews in the worship of Yahweh. They express a variety of emotions including adoration and praise to God, love and devotion to God, awe and wonder about God, dependence on God, desperation for God's deliverance or protection, sorrow and repentance over sin, gratitude for God's provision and care, a mixture of fear mingled with faith, and a hope that God's purposes will ultimately triumph in the world.

The portrait of God painted by the psalm writers is at one time transcendent and at another time immanent. At one moment, God appears as infinitely glorious with man as dust in comparison. Yet, at another moment, God's glory and transcendence give way to intimate and immanent expressions of God's love, and personal connection with and care for those he made in his image. Ultimately, however, Psalms in its totality

¹⁵²Many thanks to Cody Libolt for helping me to formulate thoughts about these implications.

presents God as one who is incomprehensible by man except to the extent that he voluntarily chooses to unveil himself to man.¹⁵³

Though the rhythm of transcendence then immanence is not always explicit in each individual psalm, this pattern resounds implicitly when considering the Psalter as a whole. One major theme sounded in Psalms is that of God as Creator (Ps 104). As Creator, he is out of man's reach. He is always separate and always distinct from the world, even when he moves in and with the creation he fashioned. As Creator, he exercises sovereign authority over his creation and accomplishes his will through his creation. He is in providential control of the affairs of men and is the ultimate author of the history of mankind.

Psalms also displays many other transcendent attributes of God set in glorious relief against the finitude of man. God, the one who is wholly other than his creation, is full of "splendor and majesty" (Ps 111:3). His dwelling place is in the heavens, and he does whatever he pleases (Ps 115:3). He is the one who is gloriously seated on high looking down on the heavens and the earth (Ps 113:4-6). His grandeur and magnificence are forever on display; yet, the greatness of God is more than the human mind can comprehend (Ps 145:3). He is holy, the Lord, the Most High (Ps 7:17). He is glorious and majestic—worthy of all praise and honor and glory of his creation. He is the King of glory, the Lord, strong and mighty (Ps 24:8).

Though the primary note sounded by the Psalter is that of the glorious and majestic transcendence of God, the immanence and condescension of God also receive

¹⁵³Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, 130-31.

significant focus.¹⁵⁴ The God of the Hebrews is one whose steadfast covenant love endures forever (Ps 136). His mighty works on behalf of his people are wonderful (Ps 107:21). He “upholds those who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down” (Ps 145:14). He satisfies the desire of every living thing and provides for their every need at the appropriate time (Ps 145:15-16). He forgives sin, heals diseases, redeems human life, and extends mercy and grace (Ps 103:3-8). He is the father to the fatherless and the protector of widows (Ps 68:5). He promises to be near to those who call upon him (Ps. 145:18). In each instance, the immanent expressions of God to his people are magnified and most fully apprehended as they are understood in context of the interpretive rubric of God’s transcendence captured by the psalms when viewed in their totality.

Psalm 104 explicitly demonstrates the rhythm of transcendence then immanence:

¹Bless the Lord, O my soul!
O Lord my God, you are very great!
You are clothed with splendor and majesty,
²covering yourself with light as with a garment,
stretching out the heavens like a tent.
³He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters;
he makes the clouds his chariot;
he rides on the wings of the wind;
⁴he makes his messengers winds,
his ministers a flaming fire.

⁵He set the earth on its foundations,
so that it should never be moved.
⁶You covered it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
⁷At your rebuke they fled;
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight.
⁸The mountains rose, the valleys sank down

¹⁵⁴Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, 132.

to the place that you appointed for them.
⁹You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.

¹⁰You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills;

¹¹they give drink to every beast of the field;
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

¹²Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell;
they sing among the branches.

¹³From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

¹⁴You cause the grass to grow for the livestock
and plants for man to cultivate,

that he may bring forth food from the earth

¹⁵and wine to gladden the heart of man,
oil to make his face shine

and bread to strengthen man's heart.

¹⁶The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

¹⁷In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has her home in the fir trees.

¹⁸The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the rock badgers.

¹⁹He made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.

²⁰You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the beasts of the forest creep about.

²¹The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.

²²When the sun rises, they steal away
and lie down in their dens.

²³Man goes out to his work
and to his labor until the evening.

²⁴O Lord, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom have you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵Here is the sea, great and wide,
which teems with creatures innumerable,
living things both small and great.

²⁶There go the ships,
and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it

²⁷These all look to you,
to give them their food in due season.
²⁸When you give it to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
²⁹When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
³⁰When you send forth your Spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works,
³²who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke!
³³I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
³⁴May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the Lord.
³⁵Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more!
Bless the Lord, O my soul!
Praise the Lord!

The rhythm of transcendence then immanence is set into motion as the psalm writer declares the magnificent greatness of God, his transcendent majesty, and his glorious splendor in the opening shouts of Psalm 104. The God of Israel is covered in infinite light (v. 2). His dwelling place is not on earth, but the heavens stretched out like a celestial tent.¹⁵⁵

Much of Psalm 104 draws from the creation account found in Genesis 1 where God is firmly established as Creator of the universe. In verse 5 and following, God is depicted as the crafter and creator of the earth who causes the mountains to rise, the

¹⁵⁵Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 33.

waters to flow, and vegetation to grow. All creatures of the earth are created by God and are a manifestation of his infinite wisdom.

In verses 10-26, the psalm writer marvels at the meticulous detail and ordered design of the natural world. The handiwork of God throughout creation is prolific and demonstrates God's planning, skill, and creativity.¹⁵⁶ God has fashioned the sun and moon to mark time and seasons. The waters provide nourishment for all living things. All creation exists harmoniously together designed by the God who stands distinctly apart from his creation—not merged with his creation as the pantheists would assert—but who is ever present with his creation.¹⁵⁷

In verse 27, the psalm shifts decisively from thinking about God in his transcendent otherness to thinking about God in his immanent nearness. God does not leave creation to its own devices. Instead, this God whose glance causes the earth to tremble and whose touch makes the mountains smoke (v. 32) is the same God who also condescends to his creation, provides for his creation, and satisfies the needs of his creation by opening his hand and filling them with good things (v. 28). All creation, great and small, is dependent on God for life.¹⁵⁸

The psalm ends with a beautiful juxtaposition of transcendence and immanence. As the psalm writer declares the glory of the Lord and reflects on the power of the Lord (vv. 31-32), he rejoices in the work of the Lord. Yet, in this final section, the

¹⁵⁶Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 34.

¹⁵⁷Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 16 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 402.

¹⁵⁸Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 34.

psalm writer decisively shifts from speaking about God objectively to speaking about God subjectively. As he declares his intention to be a worshiper of Yahweh for a lifetime, he refers to God not simply as God but as “my God” (v. 33)—a designation indicating a level of personal nearness and intimacy.

Psalm 104 captures the ethos of the entire Psalter that explicitly or implicitly shouts of the glorious greatness of God’s transcendence and then celebrates his intimate care, concern, and love for his creation. The entire Hebrew hymnbook provides a rich model for worship and worship service design that celebrates or contemplates God’s awesome transcendence first and then his merciful immanence.

Prayers in the New Testament

The believers’ prayer for boldness. The Acts of the Apostles chronicles the extraordinary, unstoppable initial spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the founding of the early church. Acts 4 records the summons and release by the Sanhedrin of the apostles Peter and John who were charged never to speak or teach in the name of Christ again—a request they refused to obey. Upon their release, Peter and John met with fellow believers and reported the Sanhedrin’s injunction against speaking of Christ and his gospel. In response, the believers lifted their voices and prayed together the following prayer recorded in Acts 4:24b-30:

²⁴ . . . Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

“Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?
²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed”—

²⁷for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

As the believers prayed, note the rhythm of transcendence then immanence.

The believers address God as “Sovereign Lord,” a common Old Testament designation for God that recognized his complete control over all natural processes and all human activity.¹⁵⁹ His will cannot be thwarted, and his purposes will assuredly be accomplished.

The prayer continues in common Old Testament terminology acknowledging God as Creator. The Sovereign Lord rightly rules over his creation because he is the sole source of all creation. He alone is responsible for the very existence of heaven, earth, and all of its inhabitants. He is the unmoved mover, the one who spoke creation into existence from nothingness. He is the glorious transcendent Creator God, and, because of this distinction, he rightly exercises sovereign rule and authority over all earthly and heavenly powers.

After the believers had firmly acknowledged and ascribed to God his transcendent and glorious otherness, they petition God to immanently appropriate his power on their behalf, to give them boldness to speak of Christ’s gospel, and to affirm their message through signs and wonders (vv. 29-30). Scripture records God’s pleasure and affirmation of their prayer. The place where they prayed shook, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit enabling them to speak the gospel with boldness (v. 31).

¹⁵⁹Lister, *God Is Impassible and Impassioned*, 194.

This prayer of the early Christians is patterned after many prayers found in the Old Testament (cf. Hezekiah's prayer in Isa 37:16-20).¹⁶⁰ Like their Old Testament counterparts, the New Testament believers ground their approach to God and their understanding of God in his transcendent otherness. This grounding in the transcendent then gives their faith strength as they ask for God's immanent provision, care, and protection for the proclamation of the gospel. It is a strong example of the rhythm of transcendence then immanence found in the New Testament.

Prayers of Paul for the Ephesians. The Apostle Paul, persecutor of Christians transformed gloriously into Christ's missionary to the Gentiles, is credited with writing much of the New Testament. In his letter to the Christians who belonged to the church in Ephesus, Paul penned two prayers. The first is recorded in Ephesians 1:16-23:

¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

In Paul's first prayer (Eph 1:16-23), he petitions God that believers might know three things: the hope in Christ to which they were called (v. 18a), the riches of his

¹⁶⁰John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1992), 148.

glorious inheritance of the saints (v. 18b), and the immeasurable greatness of the power of God for those who believe (v. 19). Paul's petitions are based on the fundamental and foundational understanding of God in his transcendent otherness articulated in verse 17. Paul expresses this liturgically as he defines the "God of our Lord Jesus Christ" as the "Father of glory." Here, Paul acknowledges that God is infinitely glorious in himself and is due the worship and praise of his people.¹⁶¹ Though this exact expression, "Father of glory," appears only once in the entire Bible, it harkens back to the Old Testament references to Yahweh as "the God of glory" (Ps 29:3) and the King of glory (Ps 24:7). Here in the letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul is stating that God is the glorious one and the source of all true glory. In this context, glory can also speak of the radiance and magnificence of God's divine presence.¹⁶²

In the writings of Paul, the transcendent terms *glory* and *power* are often used interchangeably.¹⁶³ Therefore, the address of God as the "Father of glory" can also be indicative of the immensity of his power (cf. v. 19). God's power works all things in accordance to his good plan and good pleasure. Since titles in Paul's petitionary prayers often signify a specific characteristic especially important to the context or the purpose of the prayer, perhaps the title "Father of glory" is used to accentuate that God is all-powerful and perfectly capable of answering any and all of Paul's petitions on behalf of

¹⁶¹Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2308.

¹⁶²Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 131.

¹⁶³Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 56; cf. 1 Cor 6:14 and Rom 6:4.

the church at Ephesus.¹⁶⁴ This immense, unlimited power is the same power exercised on behalf of all those who believe (v. 19).

From the necessary transcendent foundation of understanding God as the “Father of glory,” Paul then begins his intercession. Paul now focuses on the immanence of God and the blessing of his Spirit given personally to believers. He asks that they may have intimate knowledge of God in order that believers might know Christ who was raised from the dead by the power of the almighty God, the hope to which they are called (vv. 17b-18).

Paul then returns to the concept of transcendence, but this time he speaks of Christ as the transcendently glorious one. Paul makes clear that Christ is more than the God who is with us. He is not of the world as God his father is not of this world. Christ is seated at the right hand of God in heaven—a place of exaltation and power. Christ, by divine appointment of the Father of glory, has been highly exalted to a place of “unparalleled honor and universal authority.”¹⁶⁵ God has made him the sovereign ruler over all things. He transcendently reigns over believers as the God-appointed glorious head of the community of faith, the church (vv. 21-22).¹⁶⁶

Paul’s second prayer for the believers in Ephesus is recorded in Ephesians 3:14-21:

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may

¹⁶⁴O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 130-31.

¹⁶⁵Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1983), 85.

¹⁶⁶O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 141.

grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

This prayer opens with a glorious ascription to the transcendence of God, dives into the immanent fountain of the boundless love of God for his people, and then soars to a climactic doxological exclamation of the glorious transcendence of God. Paul begins his prayer unusually noting his posture of prayer, the bowed knee. Of special note, the usual posture of Jewish and early Christian prayer was standing (cf. Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11). The bowed knee was much more associated with bowing in obeisance and worship. Paul's posture is instructive to the New Testament church that prayer and worship are complementary activities, both of which necessitate reverence, humility, and awe in the presence of the transcendent King of kings.¹⁶⁷

Next, note the title given to God in verse 14b. Paul addresses God as Father. At first look, one might conclude that *Father* used here is a title of immanent familiarity. Though familial familiarity could perhaps be a secondary note, it is not the primary note sounded here. Instead, Paul is using *Father* to signify authority and dignity. Specifically, *Father* must be understood in the context of creation and the universe. God is the sovereign authority of the universe from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name (v. 15). Naming refers to more than simply providing a label. The act of naming is connected with God's position as the ultimate source of all earthly and

¹⁶⁷Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 201-2.

heavenly creation. Paul is, therefore, stressing God’s transcendent, unlimited power and sovereign authority over all things heavenly and earthbound, which derive both their identity (name) and their significance from him.¹⁶⁸ As Father, he is both Creator and Lord of all.

Before turning to the specific intercession for the Ephesian believers, Paul paints one more picture of the transcendent greatness of God as he highlights the riches of God’s glory in verse 16a. This expression is similar to the one used in Ephesians 1:18 and refers to God’s radiance and splendor. It conveys the concepts of the perfection of his character and the excellencies of his work.¹⁶⁹ God’s glory reflects the “weight of significance or importance that is found in his very being.”¹⁷⁰ His glory is inexhaustible. The whole earth is full of the glory of God. The heavens perpetually declare the glory of God. God is glorious.

After the powerful context of God’s transcendent greatness, glory, power, and sovereignty are established, Paul then launches into the wellspring of God’s incredible love and unlimited power available through the Holy Spirit as believers are filled with the fullness of God. Specifically, Paul prays that the Ephesian Christians—by the transcendent power of God extended immanently through the Spirit—may be strengthened by the Spirit, indwelt by Christ, rooted in the boundless love of Christ, and filled with the fullness of God (vv. 16b-18).

¹⁶⁸O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 256.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 256-57.

¹⁷⁰R. C. Sproul, *The Unexpected Jesus: The Truth Behind His Biblical Names* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 63.

Paul then erupts into a sudden burst of praise—a doxology infused with grand thoughts of the enormous transcendence of God then comingled with the amazing immanence of God. In verse 20, Paul provides context for the appropriate understanding of the breadth, length, height, and depth of God’s love, care, and concern for his people. God is the almighty one. His abilities are unfettered. His power is limitless. He is able to do immeasurably more than the human mind can think of or imagine. The astounding declaration of verse 20 is this: the unfathomable, transcendent power of God is personally accessible to every believer through the Spirit who indwells every Christian. To God “be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:21).

The prayers of Paul for the believers in Ephesus provide a strong liturgical model that views prayer and worship as complementary activities. Paul’s prayers also give those who plan worship services a strong liturgical model that celebrates the transcendence of God, which then provides the appropriate foundation and reference points for celebrating the immanence of God.

Prayers of Christ. Most prayers of Jesus do not explicitly demonstrate the rhythm of transcendence then immanence.¹⁷¹ Rather, they often exhibit a divine intimacy

¹⁷¹Luke records this prayer of Jesus in Luke 10:21-22 that does explicitly indicate the transcendence then immanence pattern: “In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.’” Jesus began his prayer by articulating a similar theme echoed in many prayers of the Old Testament. He declared that the Lord is transcendentally sovereign over heaven and earth because he is the Creator of the heavens and earth, a declaration of the transcendence of God.

characteristic of a father-son relationship, compassionate intercession on behalf of those in need of spiritual or physical healing, and a desire to be perfectly obedient to the will of his Father.

Though most of Jesus' prayers do not explicitly demonstrate the pattern of transcendence then immanence, nevertheless, Jesus taught his disciples to pray using the transcendence then immanence pattern. The gospel of Luke records the disciples making this curious request of Christ: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). Matthew records Jesus' full answer to their question in Matthew 6:9-13. Jesus said to pray like this:

⁹Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
¹⁰Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹Give us this day our daily bread,
¹²and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.¹⁷²

Notice the pattern. Jesus teaches that the appropriate approach to God (and the appropriate understanding of God) is found in the rhythm of transcendence then immanence. Jesus instructs that those who approach God in prayer should acknowledge three things related to God's transcendence: (1) God is distinct from humanity in his

¹⁷²Most biblical scholars agree that the final doxology, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen" was not a part of Matthew's original manuscript (D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984], 174).

dwelling, (2) God is distinct from humanity in his holiness, and (3) God exercises dominion over his kingdom.

First, though believers are privileged to have a paternal relationship with God as father, Jesus is making clear that God is distinct from his creation in verse 9. God, our Father, is not like humans. He is qualitatively and dimensionally different from flesh and bone. He is spirit (John 4:24), and his eternal dwelling place is in heaven in glorious majesty.¹⁷³ God's place in heaven reminds believers of his positional authority as sovereign ruler over all things.¹⁷⁴ Divine, meticulous governance of the details of human history proceeds from heaven, not earth.¹⁷⁵

Second, Jesus teaches that believers are to hallow (the verb form of “holy”) the name of God. God's name is a reflection of who he is—his person, his nature, and his authority.¹⁷⁶ His name must be regarded with reverential respect.¹⁷⁷ He is holy—separate, distinct, unblemished, and sinlessly perfect. His complete and utter perfection commands the utmost respect and homage from believers.

¹⁷³Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, Matt 6:9.

¹⁷⁴*ESV Study Bible*, 1831.

¹⁷⁵Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 330.

¹⁷⁶Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1992), 119.

¹⁷⁷Carson, *Matthew*, 170.

Third and finally, Jesus teaches that God is the sovereign and reigning King of kings (v. 10). “Your kingdom come” harkens back to the enthronement psalms of the Old Testament.¹⁷⁸ Psalm 29:10, an enthronement psalm, captures this similarity:

¹⁰The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.

God’s kingdom will have no end. He is a divine ruler whose royal reign in heaven will one day be ultimately and finally established on earth. To this end, believers are to pray for the eschatological consummation of the kingdom.¹⁷⁹

After firmly establishing the framework for who God is—the eternal, infinitely glorious, majestic king who is holy and worthy of reverence, awe, and respect—then Jesus teaches believers to understand God as one who is present and near his creation, who is intimately involved, and who cares about the needs of his children. He is not only a distant God who is in heaven but also he is a Father who knows about, cares for, and provides for the daily spiritual and physical needs of his children.

The model prayer continues with a recapitulation of the idea of holiness. Believers are to continually recognize their sinfulness against the backdrop of God’s transcendent holiness and perfection. In light of God’s righteousness set against human sinfulness, repentance and forgiveness become an essential part of the relationship of the finite with the Infinite as well as the finite with the finite (v. 12). Believers are to flee evil, pursue righteousness and holiness, and ask God for deliverance from evil.

¹⁷⁸Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 332.

¹⁷⁹Carson, *Matthew*, 170.

Volumes have been written on the “Lord’s Prayer,” perhaps better titled as the “Disciples’ Prayer.”¹⁸⁰ It is not in the purview of this dissertation to exhaust all of the nuances and ramifications contained therein. However, it is important to note that Christ’s didactic paradigm of prayer models the pattern of transcendence then immanence—a model that contributes strongly to the construction of a liturgical theology that would call for the same in any worshiping approach to God.

Implicit Examples of the Rhythm of Transcendence Then Immanence in Prayer

Prayers in both the Old and New Testaments take many shapes and forms. Some are incredibly brief, like the prayer for mercy of the tax collector recorded in Luke 18:13. Others are especially long like the Levitical prayer recorded in Nehemiah 9:5-38. Some prayers are spontaneous bursts of praise, while others are expressions of lament. Some prayers offer supplication; other prayers offer confession and repentance. While prayers of adoration frequently follow the rhythm of transcendence then immanence (cf. Pss 8; 29; 99; 145), prayers of confession or petition often do not—at least upon first inspection. For a moment, I will address several forms of prayer, including confession, thanksgiving, petition (supplication, lament), canticles, and benedictions, that initially seem to deviate from the pattern of transcendence then immanence.

Petitionary prayers asking God for help pervade the scriptural landscape. They often plead with God for intervention but can also express displeasure with God’s seeming absence from a situation. They can express fear, helplessness, hopelessness,

¹⁸⁰Blomberg, *Matthew*, 118.

pain, suffering, and a broad array of human emotion.¹⁸¹ Many petitionary prayers are short and begin immediately with a cry out to God. For example, Abraham prayed to the Lord, “Oh that Ishmael might live before you!” (Gen 17:18b). Moses cried out to God on behalf of Miriam, “O God, please heal her—please” (Num 12:13b). Others are longer and include a motivational reason behind the petition as illustrated in Elijah’s prayer: “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back” (1 Kgs 18:36-37). Some prayers simply complain as illustrated by Ezekiel who has just been granted a vision of the destruction of the people of Jerusalem. Ezekiel cried out, “Ah, Lord God! Will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?” (Ezek 9:8)

Some petitionary prayers are laments and express extreme grief and pain. The prayer of Jonah recorded in Jonah 2:2-9 is a significant example of this kind of prayer. It does not explicitly begin with transcendence, but, just like all prayer, transcendence forms Jonah’s foundational understanding of God. The Psalms contain many lament prayers that do not explicitly demonstrate the transcendence then immanence pattern. In fact, over half of the psalms contained in the Psalter are laments whose authors often immediately engaged in lamentation without articulating the transcendence of God. For example, Psalm 10 immediately engages God with this prayer and complaint, “Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?”

¹⁸¹Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 133.

Other psalms are confessional and immediately begin with a cry of repentance and request for mercy as represented by Psalm 51:1-2:

¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!

Still other psalms are prayers that simply begin with a sudden burst of praise or thanksgiving with no explicit reference to the transcendence of God. Psalm 34, a psalm of David, is an example of this kind of prayer:

¹I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
²My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
let the humble hear and be glad.
³Oh, magnify the Lord with me,
and let us exalt his name together! (Ps 34:1-3)

Canticles are sung prayers and often immediately express gratitude and praise to the Lord in response to something God has done without explicit reference to his transcendence. Perhaps the nativity canticles are the best examples of this kind of prayer. Mary's canticle of praise—traditionally called the Magnificat—is a response to the angel Gabriel's announcement that she had been chosen by God to bear his son, Jesus. It is strikingly similar to the Song of Hannah recorded in 1 Samuel 2:1-10.¹⁸² Luke records Mary's canticle in Luke 1:46-55:

⁴⁶My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

¹⁸²R. E. Clements, *The Prayers of the Bible* (London: SCM Press [John Knox], 1985), 210.

⁴⁹for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
⁵²he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

Zechariah, the soon-to-be father of John the Baptist, began his canticle of praise and gratitude to the Lord in this way in Luke 1:68-69:

⁶⁸Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
⁶⁹and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David.

Simeon, after he has seen the Christ child, prayed this prayer recorded in Luke 2:29-32:

²⁹Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation
³¹that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.

Some prayers are benedictions and offer a blessing to God's people without articulating God's transcendence explicitly. Numbers 6:24-26 records this blessing prayed by Aaron, "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." Likewise, in the New Testament, Paul offers this short prayer of benediction to the church at Rome, "May the God of peace be with you all. Amen" (Rom 15:33).

Second Corinthians 13:14 records this short blessing: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Each of the prayer examples listed above do not explicitly demonstrate the biblical pattern of transcendence then immanence. However, I would argue that each prayer implicitly presupposes the great, awesome, transcendent God of glory as the one who can and does hear prayers and as the one who has the power and ability to answer prayers.

Prayers for healing infer a God who has the power to do miracles, to change the course of the physical laws governing the biological functions of the human body. Prayers for help in time of crisis or of war presuppose a transcendent God who is sovereignly in control of human history, a God who is reigning in heaven, and a God who gives and takes away all authority that man possesses. Prayers for provision are underscored by the belief that all things come from the hand of Creator God. He alone is the source of all of the physical needs of his creation. Prayers of thanksgiving recognize God as Creator and source of every good and perfect gift. Prayers of human dependence and desperation are predicated on God’s transcendent independence. God alone exists without need or contingency. He needs nothing or no one; therefore, he can assuredly be depended upon as the God who sustains his creation simply by the power of his word.

Prayers of confession and repentance assume the transcendent, infinite holiness of God, while prayers of praise extol God for both who he is and what he has done. The canticles of the Old and New Testaments are most often responses of God’s people to his transcendent strength and power appropriated immanently on their behalf. The prayers of

blessing and benediction recognize the God of the universe as the only transcendent power who gives and removes blessing simply by the sheer power of his will.

While it is true that the prayers outlined above do not explicitly follow the rhythm of transcendence then immanence, it is certainly not true that the transcendence of God is absent. On the contrary, each prayer initiated in the arena of immanence always has the tacit assumption or context of God's glorious transcendence continually implied and therefore the rhythm of transcendence then immanence is being observed implicitly rather than explicitly.

Conclusion

Scripture is careful to record the dialogic nature of God and man in worship and in prayer. Prayers, scenes of worship, and God's interactions with man pervade the biblical landscape from Genesis to Revelation. In each, God is ever the initiator; man is always the responder.

After examining biblical prayers and biblical worship scenes, I am compelled to conclude that in divine-human encounters, the Bible does indeed describe a specific order and priority concerning God's transcendent attributes and his immanent characteristics. The biblical data strongly indicate an approach to and an understanding of God that conceive of God first in his transcendent otherness, then in his immanent nearness. In addition, the biblical data strongly support the assertion that God's transcendence provides the framework within which his immanence can only be most fully understood and experienced.

As documented in this chapter, the rhythm of transcendence then immanence is a dominant feature of the worship scenes and divine-human encounters captured in

Scripture. As the newly emancipated Hebrews were summoned to Mount Sinai by God, his transcendent holiness required them to approach only so far and no farther. As the temple of God was inaugurated and later reestablished, it is God's unfathomable transcendent uniqueness, holiness, creator-ness, and sovereignty that form the context for the unimaginable decision of God to abide with his people. In the interaction between Job and God, we are allowed to listen to God describe himself as one who is unmatched by anything of this world, the transcendent God who is the master architect of the world and who sovereignly, meticulously, and wisely governs every detail of human history. Isaiah and the Apostle John were given a rare glimpse of celestial divine glory that few have experienced. They saw the glory, majesty, righteousness, and magnificence of their transcendent Lord and were undone—the brilliance of his holiness unequalled, the greatness of his power and strength unrivaled.

Not only is God's transcendence in full view in the worship scenes and divine-human encounters listed above, but also his wholly otherness is proclaimed and represented in the prayers of God's people throughout Scripture. The great kings of Israel extolled God's transcendent timeless eternity, his unmatched greatness, and his boundless power. They knew their own power was derivative from the one who grants or takes away power and authority. The prophets understood God as the transcendent, all-wise, all-powerful, all-knowing Creator of the cosmos whose home is not of this world. Nothing is too difficult for the Lord of hosts who is eternally boundless and free in every way.

God's transcendence also forms the backdrop for prayers of lament, confession, supplication, thanksgiving, and benediction. Likewise, God's transcendence is an ever-

present reality shaping the heartbeat of the Psalms, canticles, and other songs of worship recorded in both Testaments. God is magnificently majestic—the Most High Lord—whose greatness and splendor are incomprehensible by the human mind. Sometimes explicit, at other times tacitly acknowledged, the transcendence of God is the biblically attested beginning point for worshiping the God who demands the exclusive and right worship of his people.

As the Old Testament gives way to the New, Christ is presented in glorious splendor with God—co-equal, co-eternal, and co-transcendent. While on earth, Christ taught his disciples to pray with the transcendent distinction of God’s dwelling, holiness, and dominion as the appropriate context for how to approach God and how to understand God. Paul and the believers in Acts saw God as transcendently glorious, infinitely powerful, and utterly sovereign.

Each prayer, each worship scene, and each divine encounter depicts the God of heaven as first gloriously transcendent. Therefore, it can rightly be said that all biblical prayers—either explicitly or implicitly—are grounded in the reality that God is wholly other than his creation, separate from his creation, and infinitely greater than his creation.¹⁸³ However, this first and supremely important concept of understanding God in his transcendent otherness is indeed the first step of a two-step pattern or rhythm. God is never only to be understood exclusively by humans as infinitely transcendent. God is also profoundly immanent. He is near and with his creation. He hears and answers prayers. He feels compassion for those in need. He dwells in intimate relationship with

¹⁸³Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 329.

those he created in his image. This is an unbelievable truth. The transcendent God of the universe—the one who needs nothing, the one who is totally and completely independent—graciously chooses to draw near, to dwell with, to care for, to love, to provide for, and to redeem those he elects to be his own. The God who is transcendent is also immanently intimate. Yet, his immanence—this love, care, and concern for his people—can only be rightly understood and rightly interpreted through the rubric of God’s transcendence. If Christians are to properly worship God, they must first correctly understand God. Therefore, the rhythm of transcendence then immanence is essential to rightly understanding God, rightly approaching God, and most effectively worshiping God. God’s transcendence gives the proper context for God’s immanent interactions with his people. When transcendence is understood first and his immanence is rightly understood through the interpretive framework of God’s transcendence, both God in his transcendent otherness *and* in his immanent nearness is more fully comprehended and, therefore, more fully magnified and more completely worshiped by believers.

As a result, I conclude that the rhythm of transcendence then immanence should have a profound impact on the development of liturgical theology and must provide a necessary rubric that shapes the worshiping church of the twenty-first century. To this end, I now offer some practical implications and application of the rhythm of transcendence then immanence on worship service planning and design in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8

IMPLICATIONS OF BIBLICALLY PRIORITIZED AND ORDERED TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE FOR MODERN WORSHIP PLANNING AND DESIGN IN THE FREE CHURCH TRADITION

Introduction

Many of today's free worshiping traditions find their genesis in the Reformation era's reaction against set liturgical forms and forced liturgical practices mandated by external ecclesial governing bodies. As a result, modern evangelical worship pastors in the free church enjoy the privilege and liberty to plan worship for their congregations in any way they wish. Prayers can be extemporaneous or written. Worship styles can be traditional or contemporary. Songs can be ancient or modern. Houses of worship can be plain and simple or elaborate and ornate. Accompaniments to worship may take the form of a modern rhythm section, a piano and organ combination, or myriad permutations of folk and contemporary instruments. Formats for orders of worship can be repeated weekly or varied extensively. The service length can be short, or it can be long. Modern free services can include the Lord's Supper regularly, occasionally, or infrequently. Theatrical lighting and projection systems can shape an "environment for worship," or a room can have only modest additions of technology. Lyrics can be distributed through screens, hymnbooks, printed worship guides, or web-based applications. The sounds of worship can be amplified or "unplugged," acoustic or electric. A choir may support some worship services while other services are supported

by a small group of singers. The choices seem endless for those who lead worship in the free church tradition. Freedom abounds. Yet, choice and freedom must be accompanied by a great sense of responsibility.

Theological drift is one potential danger for worship pastors who plan and lead worship in the context of the free church tradition. Drift ensues when principles that should be considered nonnegotiable and biblically essential to worship service planning and design become confused, obscured, or undefined. Scripture provides great clarity for many of these principles. For example, God-pleasing worship is offered in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). Worship should be sacrificial (Heb 13:15). Reverence, awe, gratitude, admiration, expectancy, and contrition are states of the heart that accompany worship (Pss 51; 100:4; Heb 4:16; 12:28). Clean hands and pure hearts are characteristic of those who are allowed to ascend the holy hill of the Lord (Ps 24:4-5). Ultimately, the worship of the believer is his very life offered to God as a living sacrifice every moment of every day (Rom 12:1-2).

Though the Bible speaks much about the attitude of the heart, the New Testament offers very little direct instruction concerning liturgical formats. This absence of specific liturgical arrangement, however, does not mean that Scripture is silent on the topic of worship service design. On the contrary, guiding biblical principles may be inferred from the many examples of divine-human encounters depicted in corporate worship settings and prayer throughout Scripture. This chapter will discuss the implications of the biblical principle of transcendence then immanence as applied specifically to the selection and sequential ordering of worship elements to be included in corporate worship services in the free church tradition. Also, this chapter will call

worship pastors to reclaim the foundational doctrine of God's transcendence as the primary template through which worship services are sculpted and God's immanence is understood and experienced.

If A. W. Tozer is correct when he states that the most important thing about us is what we think about God,¹ then it must also be accurate to assert that one of the most important considerations for worship pastors as they plan worship is how their services will shape their congregation's thoughts about and views of God. Worship services shape not only the congregants' understanding of God but also their assessment of themselves and their perspective on the world in which they live. Worship services speak, teach, and inform; they are formational, transformational, and reflective. The Christian corporate worship service has the potential to shape the life of the worshiper in profoundly sanctifying ways. God has uniquely designed people created in his image to be transformed by and into the objects of their worship. As Christians worship their God, they are shaped and re-formed into the image of God whom they adore.² As Christians worship, they sing theology, speak theology, and reenact theology. Over time, sung, spoken, and reenacted theology form the belief systems, thought patterns, attitudes, and actions of the worshiper. Hence, corporate worship is significantly influential in determining the character, personality, and life of the believer in Christ.

Yet, as highlighted in chapter 2, our views of God have gradually weakened as the age of immanence and the age of individualism have eroded the fundamental belief

¹A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), 1.

²For an in-depth examination of Scripture that supports the transformative nature of worship, see G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

that God is wholly other than his Creation. Man often displaces and replaces God's centrality in the church and in his own life. This erosion is potentially accelerated by the freedom of worship design in many churches. When theological substructures (biblical paradigms or models) for worship planning are weak or nonexistent, worship can become something that is neither healthy, God-honoring, nor scripturally faithful. David Wells contends in his book *God in the Whirlwind* that the contents of today's worship have become highly eroded. "It [worship] has been made light and insubstantial, replaced by a set of self-focused interests. There is often not enough substance to direct, discipline, and shape the forms through which the content is expressed."³

In many houses of worship, reverence and awe have been replaced with an unfitting, cavalier familiarity with God.⁴ Reverential worship presupposes a proper respect for who God is and an appropriate understanding of the relationship between finite creatures and an infinite God.⁵ Awareness of the nature of the divine-human relationship is essential. Perhaps Bruce Ware in *God's Greater Glory* best characterizes this relationship when he states:

For in this relationship, one Member of the relationship knows absolutely everything, and the other knows far less than he thinks. One Member has perfect foresight and knows every detail of what the future holds, and the other has difficulty knowing where to lay hands on his keys before he heads to the car. One Member has such perfect wisdom, insight, and discernment that there never has been a time in his entire history that his plans have proved misguided or his

³David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 188.

⁴David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 141.

⁵D. G. Hart and John R. Meuther, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 122.

judgment has been askew—while the other member of the relationship thought himself wise once when he figured out a clever shortcut to take, until he ended up on a long dead-end road! One Member possesses every quality or perfection in his being both infinitely and intrinsically—while the other possesses only a miniscule amount and only then because any and all of it has graciously been given to him by the One who has it all!⁶

If one were to ask, “how important is transcendence in worship planning,” I would argue that understanding God in his transcendent otherness is not simply important, but, perhaps surprisingly to many, it turns out to be one of the most consequential concepts a worship leader can embrace and deploy in worship planning. Divine transcendence uniquely and best provides the necessary and proper interpretive framework for God and every immanent attribute he possesses. No other concept can better clarify or explicate God’s immanence than his transcendence. Sequencing the drama of worship in such a way that begins with transcendence and incorporates the rhythm of transcendence then immanence will transform how believers conceive God and subsequently how they worship God.

As this chapter explores the implications and applications of the rhythm of transcendence then immanence for worship planning and design, I invite worship pastors who plan worship in freedom to enter a season of theological reflection about the task (and privilege) that God has placed into their hands week by week. I hope to call worship pastors either to a reorientation or a deeper orientation of worship planning and design to scriptural principles that should and must order the faith and practice of the believer, the church, and the church’s worship. I aim to encourage worship pastors to begin to

⁶Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 156.

consider the categories of God's transcendence and God's immanence as primary shaping influences on how worship services are planned. Ultimately, I hope to invite worship pastors to consider both the content of their worship elements and the sequencing of those elements in light of the God of their worship—a God who revealed himself first as transcendent and then immanent. I call worship pastors to embrace the rhythm of transcendence then immanence in their worship planning and design. To help frame this call, I will explore the following points of inquiry: 1) why does the sequential ordering of worship service elements matter, (2) what happens when theology informs doxology, and (3) what are practical ways to implement the rhythm of transcendence then immanence in worship praxis and design?

Why Sequence Matters

Before launching into the discussion on why sequence matters, I would like to make the following clarifications, disclaimers, and admissions. First, I am not advocating that worship pastors in the free church tradition return to ancient, lifeless liturgical forms. In reality, as a worship pastor for over twenty years, I have rarely planned a worship service in any way other than in freedom from set forms and independent of governing clerical bodies. I am grateful for the liberties granted to us by the courageous Reformers many centuries ago. Next, I am relatively neutral about prescribed liturgical formulae found in parts of evangelicalism. I recognize value in them but in no way advocate that all churches be restricted to prescribed liturgies (unless they freely choose to adopt prescribed liturgical practices). Finally, I am advocating that order and sequence are not neutral parts of a worship service, free or prescribed. On the contrary, sequence matters. Some in the free church do not give evidence of reflecting theologically about ordering

and sequence. Ordering is often guided not by theological principles, but by more practical musical considerations such as tempo, style, and key of songs as was strongly indicated by the Worship Design Project 2014 highlighted in chapter 3. Yet, sequence does matter, and the rhythm of transcendence then immanence is deserving of special or even dominant consideration by worship pastors for the reasons that follow.⁷

Biblical Patterns and Scriptural Contours

Sequence matters because biblical patterns and scriptural contours matter.⁸ The biblical witness to the rhythm of transcendence then immanence in divine-human encounters is recorded in the very beginning pages of God’s revelation of himself to mankind. “In the beginning, God created” establishes the pattern and priority in which believers are to view God: first as *the* Creator and then as *their* Creator, first as the one who transcends all created matter and then as the one who voluntarily draws near to his creation. The Bible does not begin by expressing God’s love, compassion, grace, or mercy. Instead, the Bible begins by establishing God as sovereign Creator—the Holy One who utterly hates sin and who condemns the willful disobedience of his creatures.⁹

In addition, fidelity to biblical models and scriptural themes necessitates a certain kind of ordering of liturgical elements in corporate worship. Hence, the order of Christian worship is well-served to be discerned from the biblical record of God’s

⁷Many thanks to Cody Libolt for helping me to think through many of the ideas contained in the following sections.

⁸Much of chap. 7 of this dissertation is devoted to establishing a clear scriptural contour of transcendence then immanence.

⁹Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 137.

encounter with man.¹⁰ Once discerned, scriptural patterns must then be invited to shape worship praxis and design. In essence, a biblically modeled order can be perceived from the divine-human encounters recorded in the Bible, many of which were discussed in chapter 7 of this dissertation. In each of these encounters, God is clearly, primarily, and initially transcendent. He is transcendent before he is immanent. He is wholly other than his creation. He is independent of his creation. He is above and beyond his creation. Yet, he is not exclusively transcendent. He is also immanent. This fascinating biblical duality of God must be represented in the dialogue of worship. He is not only distant and distinct but also the one who draws near, who cares for his creation, and who is intimately involved in working his plan meticulously throughout the course of human history. God is both transcendent *and* immanent. Both aspects must be represented in the way a worship service is structured. However, he is transcendent first and immanent second.

Sequence Expresses Priority

Sequence matters because sequence expresses priority. Gordon Lathrop, author of *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*, convincingly argues that “meaning occurs through structure.”¹¹ What comes first and what is subsequent loudly exclaims relative importance and significance. What comes first provides the essential framework for what comes second. What comes first establishes beginning points; beginning points often

¹⁰Stephen F. Winward, *The Reformation of Our Worship* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1965), 12.

¹¹Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 33.

affect ending points. Worship pastors communicate something by their selection of elements to be included in a worship service and how those elements are sequentially ordered; they communicate importance, prominence, foundational concepts, points of initiation, essentials, nonessentials, and what builds upon what.

Because worship is a dialogic expression of the rhythm of revelation and response between God and believers, the opening words (or songs) are especially important. The opening words define the identity of the one who is summoning Christians to worship. The opening words create a sense of expectation that it is God himself who is speaking and inviting us to join in the drama of worship.¹² The opening words unequivocally delineate God as the host of the “worship banquet” and worshipers as the invited guests to his worship table.¹³ The opening words establish the nature and character of God as the exclusive and sole object of Christian worship who calls believers to himself.

Faithfulness to the Biblical Narrative

Order and sequence matter because faithfulness to the biblical narrative and the grand scriptural themes matters. Each worship service communicates a portion of God’s story, and every worship service through both its form and content communicates theological convictions about God’s story that are held by the church.¹⁴ Worship pastors

¹²Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra, *Worship Words: Discipling Language for Faithful Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 48.

¹³Edith M. Humphrey, *Grand Entrance: Worship on Earth as in Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 70.

¹⁴Hart and Meuther, *With Reverence and Awe*, 16.

must be faithful to rightly convey God’s story in a way that is true to and patterned after the biblical narrative. What are the stories that worship services communicate? I contend that every worship service communicates (or should communicate) one or more of four overarching grand biblical themes: the story of God’s glory, the story of the biblical metanarrative, the story of the gospel, and the story of worship. These four stories enable believers to be more rightly oriented toward the God of their worship, to know more fully the God who summons believers to worship, and to properly understand their role in the dramatic dialogue of worship. To faithfully mirror the contours of Scripture, worship pastors must carefully cast each part of God’s story in the right way and in the right order. Not surprisingly for the student of the Bible, all four stories illuminated in the paragraphs to follow launch from and are built upon the foundation of the transcendence of God.

The glory of God. To be true to the grand themes of Scripture, worship services must faithfully express the wonder of God’s glory. The glory of God could be considered the most central story of all, subsuming all other biblical storylines.¹⁵ God is intrinsically glorious, a term most difficult to define within the limitations of human vocabulary. His inconceivable majesty transcends all human language to describe.¹⁶ According to John Piper, the glory of God “is an attempt to put into words what cannot

¹⁵I acknowledge that theologians have posited different overarching rubrics to interpret the Bible as a whole (e.g., the beauty of God, the covenant faithfulness of God, the kingship of God, et al.). However, I contend that God’s glory is the best fountainhead from which all other understandings of God and his Word flow.

¹⁶Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 1:337.

be contained in words—what God is like in his unveiled magnificence and excellence.”¹⁷

Karl Barth states that the glory of God “is the self-revealing sum of all divine perfections. It is the fullness of God’s deity, the emerging, self-expressing, and self-manifesting reality of all that God is.”¹⁸

As exclusive deity who alone is eternal, infinite, and uncreated, God alone is glorious and will not allow his glory to be diminished.¹⁹ Glory is exclusively a divine quality; no thing or no one shares this summative attribute of God.²⁰ God declares this truth in Isaiah 42:8a: “I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other.” His right hand is glorious in power (Exod 15:6). His name is glorious and awesome (1 Cor 19:13; Ps 66:2). His works are glorious (Ps 78:4). The majestic greatness of God is glorious (Ps 145:5). His throne upon which he reigns is glorious (Jer 17:12; Matt 25:31). His grace is glorious (Eph 1:6). His strength and might are glorious (Col 1:11). We are commanded to “sing the glory of his name” and to “make his praise glorious” (Ps 66:2 NASB). Ultimately, the proclamation of every Christian in worship and in life is this: the God of the Bible is transcendentally glorious (Ps 96:3).

We understand that God is intrinsically glorious only because God has chosen to reveal his glory, at least in part, in and through his creation. All creative acts of God

¹⁷John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 3rd ed. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 308.

¹⁸Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God*, pt. 1, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 643.

¹⁹Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:648.

²⁰Christopher W. Morgan, “Toward a Theology of the Glory of God” in *The Glory of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 169.

and his continued engagement within creation extrinsically declare that which is intrinsically true about himself—that he is majestically glorious.²¹ The Bible declares that “the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa 6:3b). To this end, John Calvin remarked, “The world was no doubt made, that it might be a theatre of the divine glory.”²²

As the Westminster Shorter Catechism instructs, the chief end of man is to recognize, appreciate, treasure, and reflect the glory of God²³—to ascribe to God the glory that is due his name as we worship him in the splendor of his holiness (Ps 29:2). God’s glory must be the parchment upon which every other story expressed in worship is penned. It is the glory of God that keeps the orientation of man’s attention, affection, and treasure appropriately directed toward God rather than misdirected toward himself. Man’s propensity to desire and take glory for himself is so strong that the psalmist was compelled to write: “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory” (Ps 115:1a).²⁴

The metanarrative of the Bible. To be true to the grand themes of Scripture, worship services must faithfully express the metanarrative of the Bible. The metanarrative is often summarized in four words: creation, fall, redemption, consummation. This overarching plotline unquestionably begins by casting God in his

²¹Morgan and Peterson, *The Glory of God*, 160-87.

²²John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1948), 266.

²³Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, “The Westminster Shorter Catechism” Question 1, under “Historic Church Documents,” accessed November 11, 2014, <http://reformed.org/documents/index.html>.

²⁴Stephen J. Nichols, “The Glory of God Present and Past,” in *The Glory of God*, eds. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 25.

transcendent otherness; God is the one who created out of nothing. God spoke all that exists into being. God stands transcendently apart from his creation because he himself is uncreated. He is not like us; nothing created is comparable to the one who was not created. Therefore, the metanarrative of God begins with and is framed by the transcendent “creatorship” of God. As worship leaders reflect the biblical metanarrative in their worship services, they must begin with God’s magnificent transcendence as the Uncreated One, the one who is totally independent of his creation, the one who needs nothing from this creation, the one who stands apart from his creation, and the one who stands over his creation as Sovereign and Lord.

The gospel. To be true to the grand themes of Scripture, worship services must faithfully express the gospel story. Essentially, the gospel story is this: “God is holy. Man is sinful. Jesus saves. Jesus sends.” The beginning point of the gospel shouts the transcendent otherness of God. God *is* holy. He is perfection. He is something that earth-bound humanity will never be—sinless. He is set apart from his creation and stands before his creation in complete purity. In order to capture the gospel story accurately, worship must launch with the beautiful and frightening transcendent holiness of God in full view. In the words of Wells, “Holiness is what defines God’s character most fundamentally, and a vision of this holiness should inspire his people and evoke their worship. . . .”²⁵

Early in Genesis, the Bible makes known God’s holiness and utter contempt for sinful disobedience especially revealed in God’s punishment of Adam and Eve

²⁵Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 136.

recorded in Genesis 3. As God's revelation continued in Leviticus, the sacrificial system accompanied by a host of rules, regulations, and ceremony was established to make a way for man to approach God. This system was a daily reminder of God's holiness and the people's sinful separateness from him.²⁶ Ultimately, Christ's substitutionary atoning crucifixion for the sins of man would stand forever as the testimony of the magnitude of God's holy abhorrence of human depravity.

Holiness matters to God, and holiness must matter to worshipers. Those who worship must approach with a sense of awe and wonder of the utter and complete purity of God, the splendor of his perfections, the absence of imperfection, and his separateness from all that has been created. Holiness, by its very nature, is not approached casually or with a sense of entitlement. Rather, holiness is approached by wretched sinfulness in sackcloth and ashes, in contrition and repentance, and finally in gratitude and wonder for the gifts of righteousness and forgiveness offered through the blood of Christ's redemptive work on the cross.²⁷

Yet, the gospel story is not singularly the story of God's transcendence. It is also the story of God drawing near to his fallen creation. The idea that God draws near to humans or that humans can approach God, albeit boldly (Heb 10:19), presupposes that a distance exists between the infinite and the finite, between the sinless and the sinful. It is God who initiates the journey of drawing near, first through the offer of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus and then in perpetual personal relationship mediated by Jesus

²⁶Hart and Meuther, *With Reverence and Awe*, 123.

²⁷Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 138.

Christ. God in his gracious condescension voluntarily chose to draw near to broken mankind and, through the blood of his Son, to close the once non-traversable gap that existed between rebellious man and sinless God. Through the agency of Christ, God made it possible for a human being to come into his terrifying and glorious presence. Through the gospel, God approaches man, and man draws near to God again, but in reverence and in fear for the Lord is a consuming fire (Heb 12:28-29).

God's holiness represents the epitome of his transcendent otherness. It is the essential beginning component of the gospel story and is, therefore, foundational to twenty-first century worship whose theological substructure and organizing principles are properly informed with biblical models of God's interactions with man.

Worship. The story of worship, like all of the biblical stories described above, is authored by God, commanded by God, and made possible by God as he reveals himself and calls mankind to bow down and worship him. God was not obliged to disclose himself to humanity, to rescue humanity from its wretched condemned state, or to invite the elect to join in the everlasting song of worship, adoration, and praise of the transcendent God of the universe. Yet, in his great mercy and grace, he chose to welcome believers to join him at the grand celebration of worship where he perpetually remains the transcendent God of glory and we always remain the created redeemed.

This relationship between the two parties engaged in the story of worship—indeed the drama of worship—is utterly asymmetrical. Worship is not a dialogue between two equals. God exists inside the realm of holiness. Humans exist outside the sphere of holiness. God exists inside the realm of independent self-sufficiency. Humans exist inside their own world of need and dependence. In the scriptural worldview, God is

above humanity. Humanity stands before God, not vice versa. God is the giver; humans are the receivers.²⁸ God is the originator; humans are the originated. God is the initiator; humans are the responders. In this asymmetrical relationship—this asymmetrical worship dialogue between God and man—man’s place is one of humility, seeking, gratitude, fear, contrition, and awe of the transcendent God of wonder who, to our utter amazement, would allow and even summon sinful man to engage in an intimate dialogue of worship and life with him. This is the story of worship that must be captured in every service a worship pastor prepares.²⁹

²⁸Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 18; see also 33 and 157.

²⁹New Testament worship is redefined by Christ. Deeply ensconced in the fabric of Judaism is this first command given by God to his covenant people on Sinai mountain: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:3). Surrounded by the pagan worship of myriad gods, the people of Israel were commanded to follow, serve, and obey the one true God, Yahweh. In fact, the central confession of the Jewish faith is “Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4). This statement, a profound declaration of exclusivity of allegiance to God and the rejection of any hint of polytheism, was the compass that kept Israel pointing true north in their allegiance and worship. Israel was to worship Yahweh, the great I AM, as its God singularly and exclusively. Though it took many centuries, by the end of the Old Testament, the idolatry-prone people of Israel had reformed to the point of embracing Yahweh as their only God.

In the midst of monotheistic Israel, Jesus of Nazareth burst into the unfolding story of redemption and claims to be God to those pledged to serve and worship the one true God, Yahweh. As Christ steps onto stage of redemptive drama, he inaugurates a new era of Trinitarian worship. “The Trinitarian nature of God is revealed to us in the coming of the Son, from the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit” (Due, *Created for Worship*, 149). In the minds of the New Testament writers, the concept of Trinity was simply accepted and understood. It was not a subject of the theological discourse that would later ensue among the early church fathers for the first several centuries after Christ’s ascension. At first glance, it may seem strange that the jealous God of the Old Testament who held exclusive worship rights of his people would allow for another to be worshiped. Yet, God was pleased to dwell in fullness in Christ and through Christ “to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19-20).

The New Testament writers taught that Jesus was the begotten Son of God as well as God himself. Christ came as the full and complete revelation of God the Father. John the Evangelist legitimizes the worship of Christ by attesting to the divinity of Christ (Due, *Created for Worship*, 149). In the Apostle John’s teaching, Jesus is the Lamb of God who is deserving of the same worship as God (Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 421). John records that Jesus was pre-existent with the Father in eternity past (John 17:5, 24). John also attests that it is the will of God the Father that all should worship the Son (D. A. Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002], 41). John 5:23 indicates that God receives honor as we honor Christ in worship. In fact, Phil 2:9-11 shows that God the Father himself has exalted Christ: “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every

When Theology Informs Doxology

When theology is appropriately superintending and informing doxology, the outcomes can be staggering. When theology is appropriately guiding worship service praxis and design and, specifically, when the biblical pattern of transcendence then immanence is applied to how worship elements are selected and sequenced, the following outcomes may be realized: a restoration of worship's context, a recovery of worship's biblical ethos, a reestablishment of theocentrism in the service of worship, and ultimately a reclamation of an appropriate view of God's wholly otherness by Christians as they worship.

A Restoration of Context

When transcendence is returned as a primary goal, value, or objective of the worship service planner, the proper contextualization of the God we worship and indeed the proper contextualization of the act of worship itself is restored. Immanence must be

name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

In the book of Revelation, John collocates God and Christ throughout with each receiving equal praise, equal worship, and equal adoration. In Rev 5, the twenty-four elders and four living beings bow and worship God the Father—the one who sits on the throne *and* the Lamb (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 549). In Rev 7:9, the redeemed from every nation and tongue stand before the throne of God the Father *and* before the Lamb in worship. Rev 11:15 records this example of a collocation of God and Christ: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” Rev 11:15 also teaches that the ownership of the kingdom belongs both to the Lord and his Christ. Likewise, the redeemed are referred to as the first fruits of “God and the Lamb” in Rev 14:4. Rev 12:10 attests that God and Christ hold authority—“the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come” (Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 422).

For New Testament believers, Christ transforms worship into the “gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father” (James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996], 1). Christ absolutely and irreversibly changed the face of worship. Monotheistic Unitarianism is forever transformed into Monotheistic Trinitarianism as believers worship God in Christ through the Holy Spirit (Hustad, *True Worship*, 40). God the Father in no way takes offense at worship offered to Christ. Instead, he sanctions it and demands it. Worship of Christ is the will of the Father and brings glory to the Father (Carson, *Worship By the Book*, 41). New Testament worship is forever transformed to be Trinitarian with Christ as its central focal point.

contextualized within the “mysterious ultimate context” of God’s transcendent attributes.³⁰ All biblical data about God and man point to God as being gloriously and ontologically distinct from his creation. The context in which man approaches God is that of a humble creature in the presence of one who is wholly other and infinitely above. The creature does not praise God on his own. He is allowed to thank God, glorify God, serve God, honor God, praise God, and worship God only by way of divine permission.³¹ On their own, creatures do not have the ability, possibility, or power to glorify and worship God. In the words of Karl Barth:

. . . [T]he creature is permitted to praise God. It is the permission which flows from the mercy of God to the creature in the fact that God befriends the creature, that He not only creates and claims and governs it, but that in all this He loves it, that He seeks it out in order that He may be God with it and not without it, and that in so doing He draws it to Himself, in order that it for its part can henceforth be a creature only with Him and not without Him. God gives Himself to the creature. This is His glory revealed in Jesus Christ, and this is therefore the sum of the whole doctrine of God. And the creature to whom God gives Himself may praise him. What can ability and obligation and necessity mean when everything depends on the gift of the divine love and therefore everything consists in this permission?³²

The context of worship, therefore, is one of great mystery and privilege granted by the holy and glorious God of the universe. Worshipers only come as a result of divine permission, a consent that was solely granted voluntarily through the gracious uncoerced condescension of God.

Once the amazing, sovereign King of the universe who calls and gives permission to enter his presence is understood as the appropriate context of worship,

³⁰John C. Robertson, Jr., *The Loss and Recovery of Transcendence: The Will to Power and the Light of Heaven* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1995), 85.

³¹Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:671-72.

³²*Ibid.*, 671-72.

God's immanence can begin to be properly comprehended and cherished; God's tenderness can begin to be properly appreciated. God's grace and mercy can begin to be most fully prized, God's care and provision can begin to be most fully treasured, God's love can begin to be most fully valued, and God's redemptive act in Christ can begin to be most fully extolled.

A Recovery of a More Biblically Modeled Expression of Worship

As the appropriate contextualization of worship is established, a more biblically modeled expression of worship begins to be recovered. What is the biblically modeled expression of man's worshiping response when in the presence of God? Scripture records a wide spectrum of mindsets, attitudes, and emotions that run the gamut from extreme awe to extreme celebration to extreme contrition. However, a sense of awe, wonder, brokenness, and gratitude comes to the fore as the most common responses of man to God—awe and wonder over who God is, brokenness over who man is, and gratitude for God's gracious choice to repair man's brokenness.

The prophet Ezekiel fell on his face when the glory of the Lord was revealed to him (Ezek 1:28; 44:4). The shepherds were overwhelmed with great fear when the glory of the Lord shone around them (Luke 2:9). Likewise, the disciples were in awe and wonder when a greater glory of Christ was revealed to them at the transfiguration; they fell on their faces and were terrified (Matt 17:6). As God is faithfully represented first in his transcendent, magnificent grandeur, splendor, power, glory, and holiness, the approach to God in worship and the response to God in modern worship will begin to reflect the ethos of those worshipers pictured in the pages of his Word rather than the

cavalier and casual approach to worship that often characterizes the ethos of worship in many churches today.

A Reestablishment of Theocentrism

A reassertion of the transcendence of God enabled by the biblical ordering of transcendence then immanence in worship reestablishes a more theocentric expression of worship. Right theology will not allow God to be domesticated in the minds of humans nor in the worship of his people.³³ When worship is appropriately contextualized with a foundation of transcendence, the expressions of worship will naturally be God-focused rather than man-centered. “I,” “me,” and “my” begin to grow dim and less prominently featured in the light of the glory of God’s transcendent otherness. As transcendence is reintroduced as a guiding principle to worship planning and design, the vision of the sublime that has faded from the consciousness of many Christians begins to be reclaimed as God is re-centered in his appropriate place of regal reign within the church and the life of the believer.

In addition, as worship becomes more theocentric and less anthropocentric, human individualism along with the unhealthy assertion of human preferences in worship will be repudiated. The idea that worship begins and ends with God will return, and the concept that God is both the infinitely glorious subject of worship and the infinitely holy object of worship will be in full view. In the realm of theocentric transcendence, there is no room for anyone else on the sovereign throne of glory except God and God alone.

³³Susan J. White, *Foundations of Christian Worship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 13.

A Reclamation of God's Transcendence and Appropriately Interpreted Immanence

Ultimately, when theology is allowed to govern doxology, God's transcendence is rescued from obscurity, and God's immanence is rescued from abuse. God is re-centered in worship at his rightful place as the Sovereign King, Ruler, Lord of all, and Lord over all. Anthropocentrism is jettisoned. Man understands rightly who God is and falls in humble adoration of the great God of the Ages. Man's own wretchedness is made crystal clear in the dazzling light of God's utter holiness. Man bows in complete wonderment that the transcendent God of the universe would condescend to draw near and invite the finite into the presence of the infinite in the magnificent act of worship.

When theology governs doxology, man approaches God confidently but with fear, trembling, awe, and wonder. As theology governs doxology, worship is enlivened as worshipers understand rightly who the transcendent God of glory is first. Then, his gracious and magnificent immanence can be more fully understood, appreciated, valued, and cherished. Ultimately, when theology governs doxology, a greater expression of worship fueled by a more complete view of God may be offered to the Lord in humble adoration of both who he is and what he has done on behalf of his people.

A Special Word for Worship Pastors, Worship Planners, Worship Leaders, and Ministers of Music

Before concluding this dissertation, I would like to specifically address those who have the responsibility before God and to his people to plan and/or lead worship on a regular basis. As worship pastors, we have the unique privilege of placing the very words of worship into the mouths, hearts, and minds of the people we lead—an enormous

assignment carrying with it profound implications. We have the responsibility not only of providing the words for the worshiper in the dialogue of worship but also, and more profoundly, of representing God, his words, his actions, his character, and his nature in the dialogue of worship. We must faithfully represent both sides of the worship conversation—the overtures of the Creator and the responses of the creature. The very idea that we are called upon to represent God in the discourse of worship should bring us to our knees in humble submission to God and to God’s word.

The Christian worship service is spiritually formational; therefore, it is a vitally important event in a believer’s life perhaps only trumped by his or her daily devotional life with God. Because the worship event is so important and formational, the worship service requires our thoughtful care and attention to the meticulous details of planning and preparing the drama of the worship dialogue that will be played out Sunday by Sunday in churches throughout the globe.

Worship pastors, to tell the story of God well, order and sequence matter. God was transcendent first before he was immanent. Convey God’s transcendence first in your worship service, either through song, through Scripture, through prayer, or through a brief reflection about God in his transcendent otherness. Where you start matters. Where you start can affect your final destination. Use the biblical models as your scriptural mandate to provide a theological substructure to your worship that incorporates the rhythm of transcendence then immanence throughout your worship service, but especially at its beginning.

Worship pastors, as you lead your congregations to celebrate God’s amazing work of grace through Christ’s great redemptive act on the cross, please remember that

the cross and the gospel can only be most clearly understood against the backdrop of God's holiness and his sovereignty, both of which represent profound transcendent attributes of God. As you tell the story of the gospel, reenact its profound passion, and celebrate the wonder of redemption, I implore you to remember that the gospel does not begin at the cross. As stated earlier, the gospel begins with this foundational truth: "God is holy"—arguably the most profound representation of the transcendent nature of God. The cross of redemption must always be considered through the lens of God's transcendent wholly otherness in order for the gospel to be most clearly communicated. With transcendence in full view first, the starting point of the gospel becomes God and God's holiness rather than man and man's corruption by sin. As a result, the transcendence of God and the immanence of God in Christ will *both* be magnified to their appropriate levels of significance.

Worship pastors, always be aware that only God's transcendence can provide the appropriate context for understanding most fully and completely God's immanence. We must fight modern culture's propensity to casually bypass the transcendence of God while running ill-equipped to embrace God's nearness, God's provision, God's care, and God's works on our behalf—all of which will be misunderstood without the appropriate transcendent contextualization. How often do we sidestep the mysterious, fearful, awe-full, righteous transcendence of God to embrace him primarily as the one from whom all blessings flow? Praising God for what he has done is not wrong; in fact we are commanded to praise him for his magnificent work on our behalf. However, it is a mistake to praise God for his work without establishing first who God is.

To reverse the “rush to immanence” propensity of modern times will require effort and intentionality. We must fight our own acculturated tendencies and inclinations and, as worship pastors, establish the transcendent otherness of God as we call our people to come in fear and trembling before a God who is above, beyond, and other than we are. Worship pastors, we must ensure that believers understand the God they worship, the wholly other, transcendent God for whom their transcendence-starved souls hunger. Then, the work of God and the blessings of God (expressions of his immanent care and concern) may be all the more valued and appreciated.

The following questions may prove helpful in developing a more intentional application of the rhythm of transcendence then immanence in your worship service planning and design:

1. What story am I telling about God?
2. What picture of God am I forming in the mind and heart of my congregation?
3. What biblical paradigms am I using to shape the services I lead?
4. Is my service design or service template a help or hindrance to painting an accurate picture of God?
5. Are the categories of transcendence and immanence significant players in my mind and heart as I prepare worship?
6. Does the rhythm of transcendence then immanence affect the way I select and sequence elements for worship services?
7. Is the foundational picture of God that I paint each Sunday grand, enormous, majestic, holy, sovereign, glorious, all-mighty, timelessly eternal, infinite, all-wise, and all-knowing?
8. Has the cultural “rush to immanence” affected the way I plan a worship service?
9. Do I focus more on what God does than who God is?

Finally, worship pastors, I encourage you to vigilantly examine the words of introduction, transition, or instruction that you speak in your services of worship. Words matter. Words communicate. Ask yourself, “What am I communicating about God, about his people, or about the world?” Words chosen carefully accomplish more than words chosen poorly. Write them out. Revise and craft your thoughts for maximum impact. Compare them to Scripture. Inform them with Scripture. God’s words will always be more powerful than human words. A carefully chosen word takes time, energy, effort, thought, and prayer. Yet, “like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances” (Prov 25:11 NASB). The impact on your congregation is worth the investment.³⁴

Also examine carefully the words that you place into your congregation’s mouths to say or sing. Meticulously scrutinize the lyrics of the songs you select to offer in the dialogue of worship. Write out lyrics to the songs for maximum apprehension of a song’s meaning. This will help you to know the message you are communicating as well as enable you to evaluate the lyrical content of each song. Concerning lyrical viability and biblical fidelity, ask: “What is the message of this song?” “What does the message communicate about the transcendence of God?” “What does the song teach about the immanence of God?” “What do the lyrics teach about God, man, or the relationship between God and the world?” “Are the lyrics scripturally informed and biblically faithful?” “Will the lyrics help to form a fuller and more accurate picture of who God is?”

³⁴Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 19.

“Will the lyrics appropriately frame God’s love, care, and concern for his people in the appropriate context of God’s transcendent otherness?”

Your role as a worship pastor is notably consequential. You are a pastoral artist called upon weekly to paint a portrait of God for your congregation. God has given you the paint, the brush, and the canvass through his Word in order to craft momentous opportunities for weekly encounters for the gathered church with their God. Your role is to “inspire worshipers to see the true and holy God of glory,”³⁵ to turn their gaze from the mundane to that which is eternal, to celebrate God for who he is, and then to celebrate what God does. You have been given stewardship of God’s story, God’s character, and God’s condescending grace and mercy that save undeserving sinful man. Remain true to the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). In your freedom, employ sound biblical principles and models to form a solid theological infrastructure for your worship services. Much is at stake.

Conclusion

Are the categories of transcendence and immanence important considerations for worship planning and design? The answer is a resounding yes. Not only are they important, but they are also of paramount importance for a worship pastor’s consideration as he contemplates and plans worship services.

Worship in the free church runs the risk of being impoverished from a lack of biblical groundings. I do not endorse meaningless ritual and am not proposing that all

³⁵Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2006), 37.

free churches embrace liturgical structures. What I am proposing, however, is that order and sequence are consequential. Order and sequence are defining principles in every tradition, including the free church tradition. Order and sequence establish the relative importance of the elements that are included in a worship service. Order establishes the beginning place of worship and, therefore, is immensely influential to the overall direction and ultimate destination of any worship journey. What comes first in an order of worship interprets and establishes the context for every other element.

My ultimate recommendation is this: worship pastors in the free evangelical tradition, because they are not governed by set liturgical formulae, should seek other scriptural guiding principles that can inform the goals, values, and objectives that influence how they select and order the liturgical elements that will comprise the worship offering of their congregations Sunday by Sunday. A service of worship properly constructed deepens the congregants' understanding of God and helps them to accurately perceive themselves and their world as God's creation.³⁶ Though little is said about the form of New Testament worship, liturgical practices can definitely be inferred from Scripture in both Testaments. Since Scripture is the sole and sufficient rule of faith and practice, worship pastors may discern biblical paradigms and guiding principles to help construct God-glorifying, Christ-honoring services of worship.³⁷

For the free church, perhaps the most important theological substructure to be applied to worship planning and design is that of the rhythm of transcendence first and

³⁶Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 37.

³⁷Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 30.

immanence second. Worship is affected, empowered, enhanced, or diminished by the manner in which the worshiper conceives and perceives God. In the words of Allen Ross in *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, “The greater our appreciation and apprehension of the majestic God whom we say we worship, the greater will be our reverence, adoration, and service.”³⁸

May worship leaders be encouraged that what they do week-by-week is far more consequential than simply creating a set list. Their goals, values, and objectives—indeed, their own view of God—are shaping an entire congregation’s understanding of God, themselves, and their world. How a service begins matters. Sequential order matters. Spoken words matter. The role of the worship leader is decidedly influential to the corporate and individual worship lives of the Bride of Christ. May worship leaders find the rhythm of transcendence then immanence a strong biblical paradigm upon which worship services may be formulated and led to the glory of God.

³⁸Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 41.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

As this dissertation comes to a close, I offer a brief summary of the preceding chapters. Following the summary, I will propose several topics for future research.

In chapter 1, I presented the catalyst for this dissertation: the need to reform the worship practices within the free church tradition, the wing of the Christian church whose liturgical choices are not governed by external mandates. With freedom comes both opportunity and responsibility. With freedom also comes vulnerability to worldly influences and the potential for theological drift. I highlighted the need to restore a sense of mystery, wonder, and awe of God in Christian worship. Biblical anchor points and scriptural models help to ensure the fidelity of worship service praxis and design for the modern free church.

Also in chapter 1, I presented my main argument that provides the impetus for the dissertation: In divine-human encounters recorded in Scripture, a biblical pattern emerges that conceives and understands God first in his transcendent otherness, which then provides the framework for comprehending and experiencing his immanent nearness. The rhythm of transcendence then immanence, if indeed a biblical pattern, has great potential to provide a significant framework through which liturgical choices are made and liturgical structure is determined, especially for churches in the free evangelical tradition. The biblical rhythm of conveying or apprehending God first in his

transcendence and then in his immanence also has the potential to transform how Christians approach God in their corporate worship gatherings.

Chapter 2 continued to highlight the need for further reform of Christian worship in the free church tradition. I underscored two phenomena that influence the modern church: the age of immanence and the age of individualism. In the age of immanence, man rushes past God's transcendence in order to embrace those parts of God that are much more inviting and much less threatening—his love, his care, his concern, his provision, his patience, his grace, and his mercy. In the age of immanence, God is perceived primarily as love without holiness, immanence without transcendence.¹ The result is an incomplete understanding of God that leads to an impoverished expression of corporate worship void of mystery, awe, and wonder.

The age of individualism exacerbates the impact of the age of immanence on the church's worship. In the age of individualism, man becomes central while God is relegated to the periphery. On the periphery, God becomes inconsequential, domesticated, and weightless. On the periphery, the grandeur and majesty of God's transcendence fades; God is acknowledged by man but without being central to man. Marginalized, God's impact on man's life and worship is diminished. The residual effect of the age of immanence and the age of individualism is a malformed view of God largely divested of transcendence leaving the immanence of God as the unintended dominant framework for understanding God—an understanding that Scripture does not model or intend.

¹Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 58.

Chapter 3 highlighted the findings of the Worship Design Project 2014 (WDP). The WDP was a research initiative designed to validate or refute the primarily anecdotal claims of chapter 2—namely, that the transcendence of God has been lost or minimized in today’s worship settings in the United States. My intent was to empirically corroborate or invalidate the idea that modern worship services are more immanently oriented than transcendently grounded. Presupposing that the corporate worship life of the free church is primarily governed by its local worship pastors rather than an external ecclesial governing body, the WDP sought to identify the goals, values, and objectives that influence how worship pastors in Southern Baptist churches select and sequence elements that comprise their worship services.

The results of the WDP concluded that the goal, value, or objective of conveying God in his transcendent otherness is not strongly influential to Southern Baptist worship pastors as they plan worship services or select elements to be included in worship services. In addition, the goal, value, or objective of conveying God in his transcendent otherness first and then in his immanent nearness second is not strongly influential to how most worship pastors construct the sequential ordering of their worship services. Instead, the ordering of worship elements (songs, prayers, etc.) in Southern Baptist churches is most often governed by musical considerations. A movement from fast and celebrative to slower and contemplative exerts the strongest shaping influence on the sequence of most Southern Baptist worship services. Other strong influencers on sequential ordering are the stylistic considerations of a song, the key of a song, or key relationships between songs. In general, the research from the WDP indicates that worship pastors in Southern Baptist churches tend to be more immanence focused rather

than transcendence grounded giving credence to the assertion that the age of immanence indeed affects many Southern Baptist churches.

Chapter 4 outlined the biblical historical grounding of the concept of God's transcendence. Transcendence is a term used to describe the qualitative difference between God and man. Essentially, transcendence means that God is above humanity, beyond humanity, and wholly distinct from humanity and his creation. As Creator, God is the unmoved mover. All things created find their genesis in God, the uncreated one. He is infinite in holiness, knowledge, and power. He is independent and fully free to bring about anything he wills to do. In his independence, God needs no one or nothing. God is inescapable. All of God is everywhere at all times. He is timelessly eternal and temporally everlasting. Transcendence is the appropriate and essential beginning place for properly understanding God.

Not only is God utterly transcendent, but also he is utterly immanent. God is at once altogether separate and infinitely close. Though he is high, above, and beyond humanity, he has chosen not to isolate himself from humanity. He is present with his creation but cannot be captured by his creation. God is dually transcendent and immanent. Immanence, however, is best understood through the interpretive framework of God's transcendence. Therefore, in chapter 5, I demonstrated how the Bible roots God's immanence in his transcendence. God's sovereign rule over his creation and gracious provision for his creation are outflows of his transcendent "creator-ness." The judgment and wrath of God are immanent extensions of his transcendent holiness. God's benevolence, mercy, grace, redemption, abiding presence, jealousy, and fatherly care are immanent expressions of his transcendent inter-Trinitarian love. God's transcendent

freedoms are expressed immanently in God's providence, personal knowledge and wisdom, nearness, and relational mutability. Perhaps one of the most remarkable immanent expressions of God's freedom is his invitation to the elect to join him in his eternity forever. Chapter 5 concluded with the recapitulation of the idea that for God to be rightly understood—a necessary prerequisite for the right worship of God—he must be apprehended as the one who is first transcendent and then as the one who is immanently connected to his creation.

Chapter 6 addressed a formidable objection to my thesis. If Christ, God with us, is truly the ultimate expression of God's immanence, then perhaps transcendence is no longer the appropriate beginning point for understanding God in New Testament times. In chapter 6, I discussed the portrait of Christ painted by both the Old and New Testaments. In Genesis, Christ is the transcendent Word—co-existent and co-eternal with God—that spoke all creation into being. In Isaiah 6, Christ is gloriously transcendent, high and exalted. The gospels feature the mystery of the incarnation as God the Son took on flesh. Yet, as he took on human form, he did not subtract any divine quality. He remained fully God as he became fully man. In the eschaton, Christ is depicted in Revelation as the slain Lamb who transcendentally and sovereignly rules the new heaven and the new earth. Also in Revelation at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the Bride of Christ enters the banquet hall not as equals with Christ but as redeemed, invited guests of the one who is both gloriously transcendent and mercifully immanent.

Chapter 7 forms the central focal point of this dissertation and highlights the biblical rhythm of transcendence then immanence characteristic of divine-human encounters. This rhythm is a consistent feature of Scripture's record of man meeting God

individually, man meeting God corporately in worship, and man meeting God in prayer. Individuals like Moses, Job, Isaiah, and the Apostle John were given glimpses of God's transcendence. They saw God's glory, majesty, holiness, and magnificence and were totally undone. The great kings of Israel proclaimed the unmatched greatness and infinite power of their God. The emancipated Hebrews were eyewitness to the power and untouchability of the God they served while simultaneously being the benefactors of his care, provision, and protection. The temple was a constant reminder of both God's separateness from his people and his desire to abide with his people. In the New Testament, Christ was not born simply as a man, but rather as the God-man. He was transcendence wrapped in immanence, God enfleshed.

The corporate worship scenes recorded in Scripture depict a God who is magnificently glorious, astonishingly majestic, marvelously grand, infinitely holy, and boundlessly strong. Yet, this limitless and transcendent God of the universe is also portrayed as one who is personal, who hears the prayers of his people, who desires to dwell with his people, and who cares for the needs of his people. Prayers throughout both Testaments implicitly or explicitly acknowledge God in his wholly otherness. Each prayer, each worship scene, and each divine encounter paints a portrait of God who is first transcendently glorious and then immanently near. This two-step pattern permeates Scripture. Christ outlined the rhythm of transcendence then immanence in the Lord's Prayer. As he taught his disciples to pray, Christ modeled an approach to God that is first centered on God's separateness from his creation. God is in heaven. His dwelling place is not earthly, and his name is holy. After the appropriate transcendent context is established in prayer, then God's gracious care and provision may be acknowledged.

Chapter 8 highlighted specific implications of the rhythm of transcendence then immanence on worship praxis and design. Because worship in the free church tradition can take any form, it is of paramount importance that worship pastors seek biblical paradigms that can inform both the content and internal structure of the worship services they craft. Sequence matters. Beginning points matter. Conveying the story of God's glory, the biblical metanarrative, the gospel, and worship in the right way and in the right order matters. In order for the biblical view of God to be most faithfully modeled in worship services, God must first be represented in his wholly otherness, and his immanence must be interpreted through and by his transcendence. Only then will the glory of God be most fully understood and the nearness of God be most completely appreciated.

Chapter 8 also encouraged worship leaders to fight the enemy of the age of individualism and our cultural tendency to rush past God's transcendence to embrace his immanence. The rhythm of transcendence then immanence can be a valuable tool for worship pastors to reform modern worship and restore an appropriate vision of God's transcendence and accompanying mystery, awe, and wonder to corporate worship services. A worship service appropriately constructed will help worshipers properly view God, properly view themselves in light of God, and properly view their world in which they live.

Areas for Further Research

The book of Hebrews, its view of divine transcendence and immanence, and its potential instruction for modern worship could serve as an excellent focal point for further research. In addition, I would like to specifically highlight five additional areas of

potential research springing from the Worship Design Project 2014. Because the WDP is the first study of its kind in the free church tradition and specifically in the Southern Baptist churches, opportunities abound for further study.

First, the WDP could be administered to a variety of denominations within the Christian church that would also consider themselves “free” in their ability to construct and design worship. Then, comparisons could be made among like-minded denominations concerning the design and praxis of worship services. Also, the WDP could be administered to Southern Baptist churches whose average worship attendance falls beneath 1,100 with subsequent comparisons made between larger and smaller churches and between churches with full-time worship pastors and part-time worship pastors. In addition, administering the WDP to worship pastors of church plants and revitalizations in North America could shed valuable insight on the design practices of worship pastors in new or renewing churches.

Second, specifically related to transcendence and immanence, further study could be conducted on the quantity, quality, and tempo of extant songs that view God primarily through the lens of transcendence in comparison to the quantity, quality, and tempo of songs that view God primarily through the lens of immanence. This kind of study would attempt to discover how much a worship pastor’s planning is affected by the kinds of musical resources available.

Third, an area of further study could attempt to establish a connection between the propensity of worship pastors to convey God transcendentally or immanently and the following variables: geographic location of churches (southern, eastern, southwestern, western, etc.), church demographics (urban, rural, inner-city, economic levels of the

congregation, education levels of the congregation, etc.), amount of undergraduate or post-graduate work completed by the worship pastor, kind of undergraduate or post-graduate work completed by the worship pastor, or amount of involvement by the senior pastor in the service planning process.

Fourth, the WDP could be administered again to worship pastors of Southern Baptist churches at distinctive time intervals in the future (i.e., in five years, then in ten years, etc.). The data derived from subsequent iterations of the WDP would provide delta measurements (Δ = change in) of worship service design and praxis over time.

Finally, the WDP specifically focused on the worship pastor's goals, values, or objectives that shape his or her selection and sequencing of worship elements for congregational worship services. An interesting follow-up study would survey the congregation's perceptions of the portrait of God that is painted by and through the services of worship they experience weekly. Comparing the congregation's perceptions with the worship pastor's intentions could prove both instructive and beneficial to worship pastors in how they plan services of worship.

Final Thought

That God revealed himself first as the transcendent Creator of the universe is not fortuitous, I believe, but providentially intentional. To rightly worship God, the worshiper must first understand God in his transcendent otherness. Then, and only then, will God's gracious condescension be comprehended and appreciated in all of its fullness and with all of its meaning. When the transcendence of God forms the appropriate context for Christian worship, believers are rescued from their "rush to immanence" and from their culturally-shaped fixation upon themselves. When the rhythm of

transcendence then immanence guides the worship journey, believers experience the mystery, awe, and wonder of God that their souls hunger for. When the rhythm of transcendence then immanence shapes a service of worship, God will be seen in his glorious splendor, *first* for who he is, and only then for what he does on behalf of those he created in his image. In short, the rhythm of transcendence then immanence enables worshipers to appropriately magnify all of God—his glorious transcendence *and* immanence. May the word of God and the biblical rhythm of transcendence then immanence form and transform the way worship services are planned in the free church tradition, and may the boundless God of wonder and glory be exalted in an ever greater way by those who call him Lord.

APPENDIX 1

THE WORSHIP DESIGN PROJECT 2014: SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES REPORTED IN THE AGGREGATE

The following eight-page research survey entitled the Worship Design Project 2014 was administered via Internet through SurveyMonkey to select Southern Baptist worship pastors throughout the United States. All response data are reported in the aggregate. Percentage calculations have been rounded to a single decimal point.

SURVEY PAGE 1

THE WORSHIP DESIGN PROJECT – PURPOSE AND AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

THE WORSHIP DESIGN PROJECT

Worship Service Planning and Design
A PhD Dissertation Research Survey

Purpose and Agreement to Participate

Thank you for participating in this survey of music and worship ministries of the highest attended churches (top 500) in the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States. This survey seeks to discern how ministers of music select and sequence the elements of their services of worship. Your participation is part of new and groundbreaking research in the area of worship service planning and design in SBC churches.

All data collected will be used for dissertation research purposes. A list of the highest attended churches (top 500) in the SBC and churches responding to this survey will be included in the dissertation's appendix; however, data/responses will NOT be linked to specific churches or specific ministers of music in any way. All data and the subsequent analysis will only be reported in the aggregate.

For the purposes of this survey, the following titles and their variations are used interchangeably: Minister of Music, Minister of Music and Worship, Worship Pastor, and Worship/Creative Arts Pastor.

This survey assumes that the minister of music is the person who has the most influence on worship service planning, ordering, and design (other than the senior pastor). To standardize the data sources, I respectfully request that only the senior minister of music complete this survey. If you are not the person who has the most influence on worship planning (other than your pastor), please forward the preceding email to the person who would best fit that description.

Thank you so much for your participation. It is my prayer that the results of this survey will edify and encourage ministers of music across the SBC, an organization that I love and am thankful to serve. May God bless and use the data collected to strengthen his church and to empower an ever-deepening expression of worship by his people.

In Christ,

Chuck Lewis
PhD Candidate in Christian Worship,
Department of Biblical Worship
Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky

1. Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify factors that influence how the elements of a worship service are chosen and sequenced in Southern Baptist Churches. This survey is being conducted by Chuck Lewis for purposes of dissertation research. In this survey, you will be asked to answer questions relating to how you plan your worship services, how you select worship elements, and how you sequence the elements of your worship service. The specific source of the information you provide will be held strictly confidential. At no time will your name be reported or your name/church name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

First Name _____

Last Name _____

Church Name _____

City _____

State _____

Table A1. Number of churches participating listed by state or U.S. territory

<i>State</i>	<i>Number of Churches that Successfully Participated</i>
AL	14
AR	3
AZ	2
CA	13
CO	1
FL	22
GA	23
IA	2
IL	2
IN	1
KS	1
KY	11
LA	5
MD	1
MO	10
MS	8
NC	24
NM	1
NV	2
NY	1
OH	6
OK	6
PR	1
SC	12
TN	22
TX	59
VA	14

SURVEY PAGE 2

PRELIMINARIES

2. Are you the person who most influences worship service planning, ordering and design (other than your senior pastor)?

Yes No

Table A2. Responses to Q2

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Yes	267
No	0
Count n=	267

3. Please confirm that your church is a Southern Baptist or Southern Baptist affiliated church.

Yes No

Table A3. Responses to Q3

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Yes	267
No	0
Count n=	267

4. Does your church meet on multiple sites or more than one campus?

Yes No

Table A4. Responses to Q4

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	103	38.7
No	163	61.3
Count n=	266	

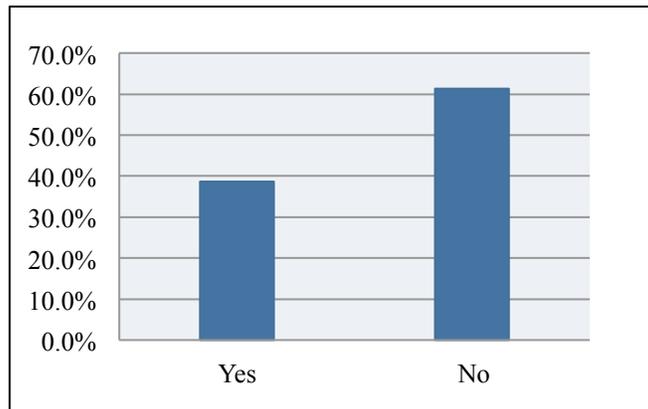


Figure A1. Does your church meet on multiple sites or more than one campus? (Q4)

5. How many worship services commonly occur at your church’s main campus each weekend (excluding Sunday night)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8+

Table A5. Responses to Q5

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
1	17	6.4
2	86	32.2
3	83	31.1

Table A5—Continued.
Responses to Q5

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
4	49	18.4
5	22	8.2
6	4	1.5
7	4	1.5
8+	2	0.7
Count n=	267	

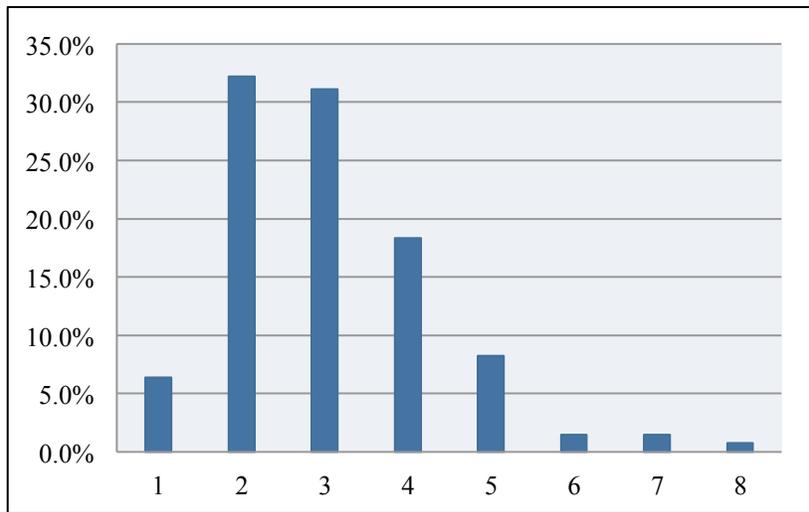


Figure A2. How many worship services commonly occur at your church's main campus each weekend (excluding Sunday night)? (Q5)

6. If you are multi-site, how many total worship services commonly occur at all of your church campuses each weekend (excluding Sunday night)?

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ 8 ___ 9 ___ 10 ___ 11 ___ 12 ___ 13
 ___ 14 ___ 15 ___ 16 ___ 17 ___ 18 ___ 19 ___ 20+

Table A6.
Responses to Q6

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
1	7	6.9
2	6	5.9
3	14	13.7
4	15	14.7
5	17	16.7
6	14	13.7
7	8	7.8
8	2	2.0
9	2	2.0
10	4	3.9
11	2	2.0
12	0	0.0
13	2	2.0
14	2	2.0
15	1	1.0
16	2	2.0
17	0	0.0
18	2	2.0
19	1	1.0
20+	1	1.0
Count n=	102	

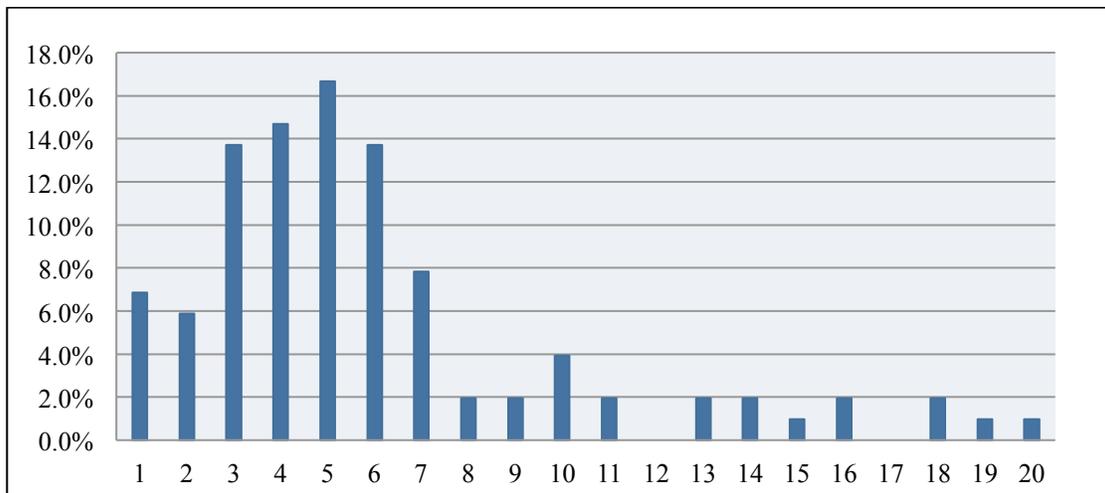


Figure A3. If you are multi-site, how many total worship services commonly occur at all of your church campuses each weekend (excluding Sunday night)? (Q6)

7. Geographically, please select the term that best describes the location of your church's main campus.

Urban Suburban Rural Other (please specify _____)

Table A7. Responses to Q7

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Rural	20	7.8
Suburban	183	70.9
Urban	55	21.3
Count n=	258	

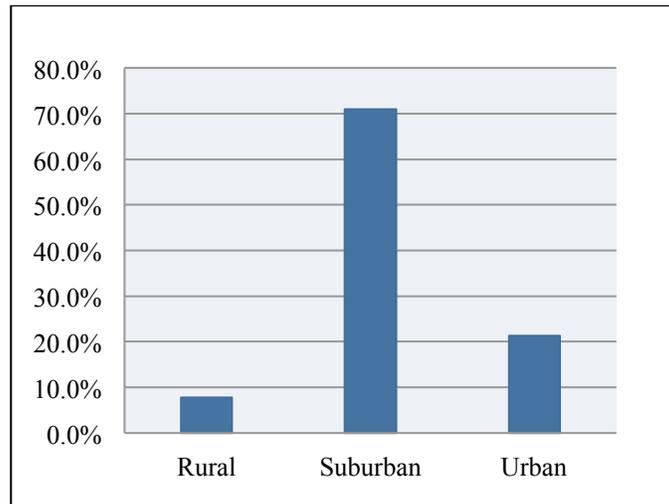


Figure A4. Geographically, please select the term that best describes the location of your church's main campus (Q7)

SURVEY PAGE 3

YOUR MAIN OR PRIMARY WORSHIP SERVICE – MAIN CAMPUS

To sharply focus this survey, please answer the upcoming questions thinking only about your primary or main weekly worship service. If your church has more than one weekend service, please consider your main service as the MOST ATTENDED weekend worship service at your church’s MAIN campus. Also, please assume that the questions are directed at worship service planning for a NORMAL or TYPICAL weekend service. A typical/normal service can be defined as one that is not seasonally influenced (e.g., Christmas) or a service that is not influenced by a special emphasis (e.g., Sanctity of Life).

8. Please estimate the average attendance at your main worship service (most attended) held on your main campus (one single service).

- | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| ___ Under 200 | ___ 200-300 | ___ 300-400 | ___ 400-500 |
| ___ 500-600 | ___ 600-700 | ___ 700-800 | ___ 800-900 |
| ___ 900-1,000 | ___ 1,000-1,250 | ___ 1,250-1,500 | ___ 1,500-1,750 |
| ___ 1,750-2,000 | ___ 2,000-2,500 | ___ 2,500-3,000 | ___ 3,000-3,500 |
| ___ 3,500-4000 | ___ Other (please specify _____) | | |

Table A8. Responses to Q8

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
300-400	6	2.2
400-500	18	6.7
500-600	26	9.7
600-700	20	7.5
700-800	30	11.2
800-900	15	5.6
900-1,000	20	7.5
1,000-1,250	40	15.0
1,250-1,500	31	11.6
1,500-1,750	12	4.5
1,750-2,000	21	7.9
2,000-2,500	13	4.9
2,500-3,000	3	1.1
3,000-3,500	6	2.2
3,500-4,000	2	0.7
4,000+	4	1.5
Count n=	267	

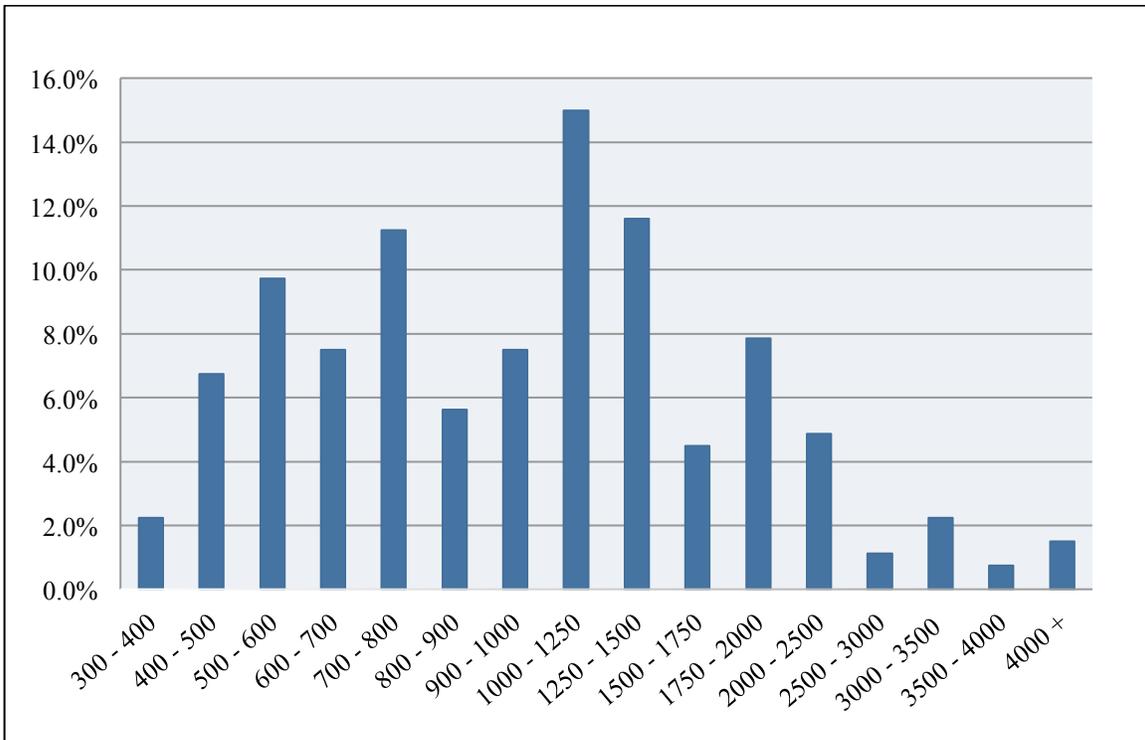


Figure A5. Please estimate the average attendance at your main worship service (most attended) held on your main campus (Q8)

9. Who contributes to the planning of your most attended worship service? Please check all that apply.

- Worship Pastor/Minister of Music
 Worship Associate
 Technical Director
 Media/Video Director
 Intern
 Band Leader
 Creative Arts Pastor/Director
 Lighting Director/Designer Pastor
 Drama Director
 Administrative Assistant
 Instrumental Director/Coordinator
 Other (please specify _____)

Table A9. Responses to Q9

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Worship Pastor/Minister of Music	260	97.4
Worship Associate	127	47.6

Table A9—Continued. Responses to Q9

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Technical Director	93	34.8
Media/Video Director	107	40.1
Intern	21	7.9
Drama Director	8	3.0
Administrative Assistant	52	19.5
Instrumental Director/Coordinator	53	19.9
Band Leader	51	19.1
Creative Arts Pastor/Director	48	18.0
Lighting Director/Designer	40	15.0
Pastor	176	65.9
Other	33	12.4
Count n=	267	

(The response percentage is calculated as a function of total respondents for Q9, n=267)

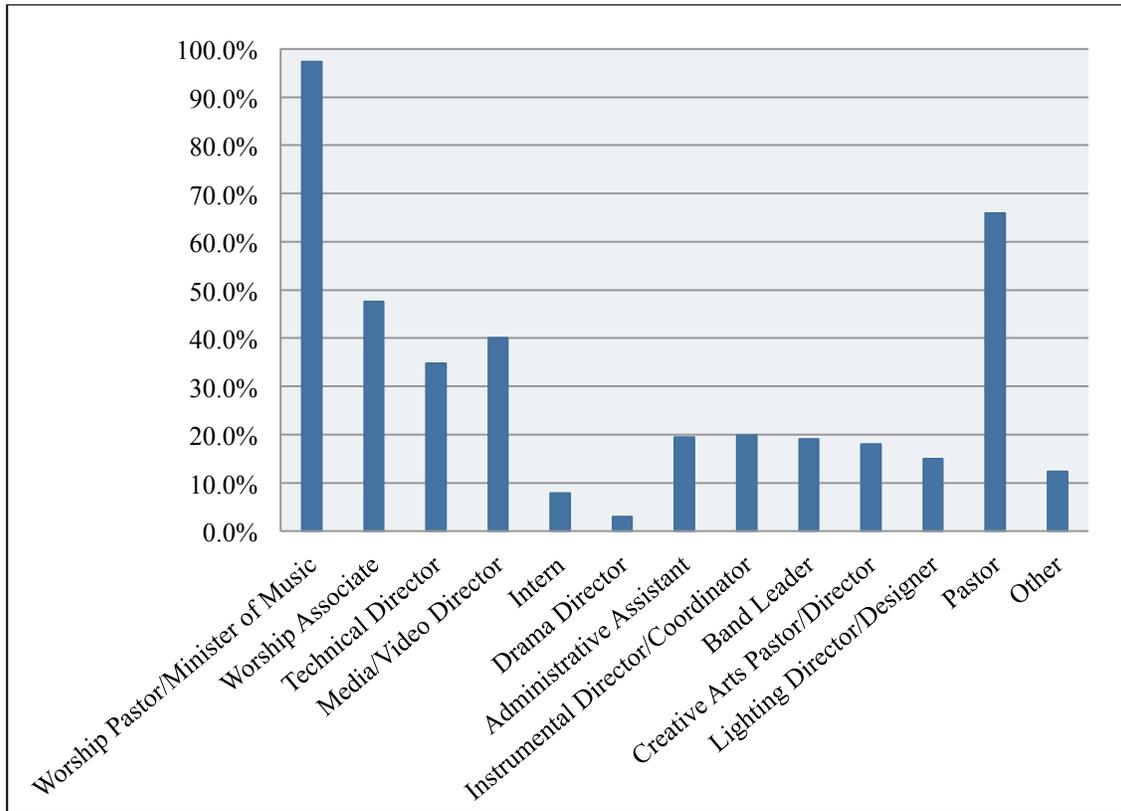


Figure A6. Who contributes to the planning of your most attended worship service? (Q9)

10. Typically, how long is your most attended worship service in its entirety (please exclude prelude and postlude)?

___ 30 ___ 35 ___ 40 ___ 45 ___ 50 ___ 55 ___ 60 ___ 65 ___ 70 ___ 75 ___ 80
 ___ 85 ___ 90 ___ 95 ___ 100 ___ 105 ___ 110 ___ 115 ___ 120+
 ___ Other (please specify _____)

Table A10. Responses to Q10

<i>Answer Choices (Minutes)</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
30	1	0.4
50	1	0.4
55	1	0.4
60	34	12.8
65	38	14.3
70	60	22.6
75	80	30.1
80	14	5.3
85	6	2.3
90	20	7.5
95	3	1.1
115	5	1.9
120+	3	1.1
Count n=	266	

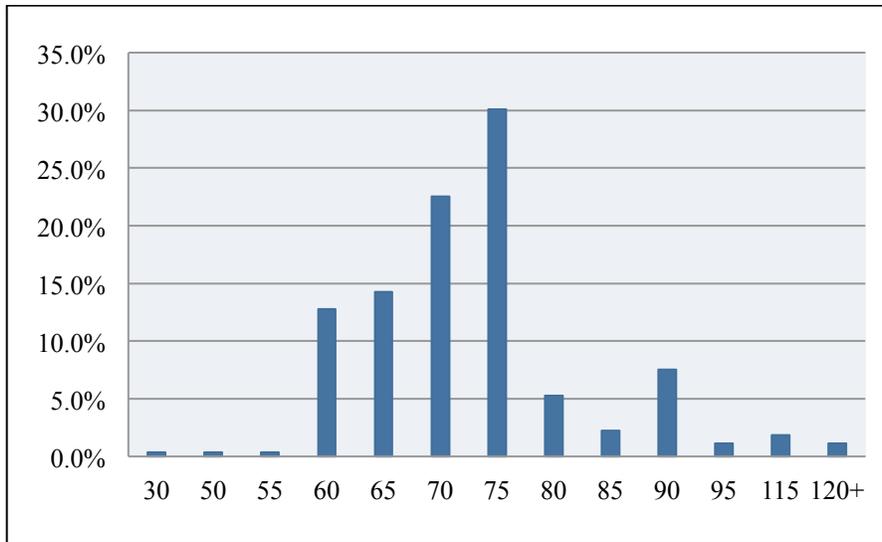


Figure A7. Typically, how long is your most attended worship service in its entirety? (Q10)

11. How long is the portion of your most attended worship service prior to the sermon (please exclude the prelude)?

___ 10 ___ 11 ___ 12 ___ 13 ... ___ 120+

Table A11. Responses to Q11

<i>Answer Choices (Minutes)</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
10	2	0.7
12	2	0.7
15	6	2.2
16	1	0.4
17	1	0.4
18	5	1.9
19	1	0.4
20	29	10.9
21	2	0.7
22	11	4.1
23	12	4.5
24	3	1.1
25	67	25.1

Table A11—Continued. Responses to Q11

<i>Answer Choices (Minutes)</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
26	7	2.6
27	10	3.7
28	7	2.6
30	62	23.2
32	1	0.4
33	3	1.1
35	15	5.6
36	1	0.4
37	1	0.4
40	9	3.4
45	4	1.5
50	2	0.7
60	3	1.1
Count n=	267	

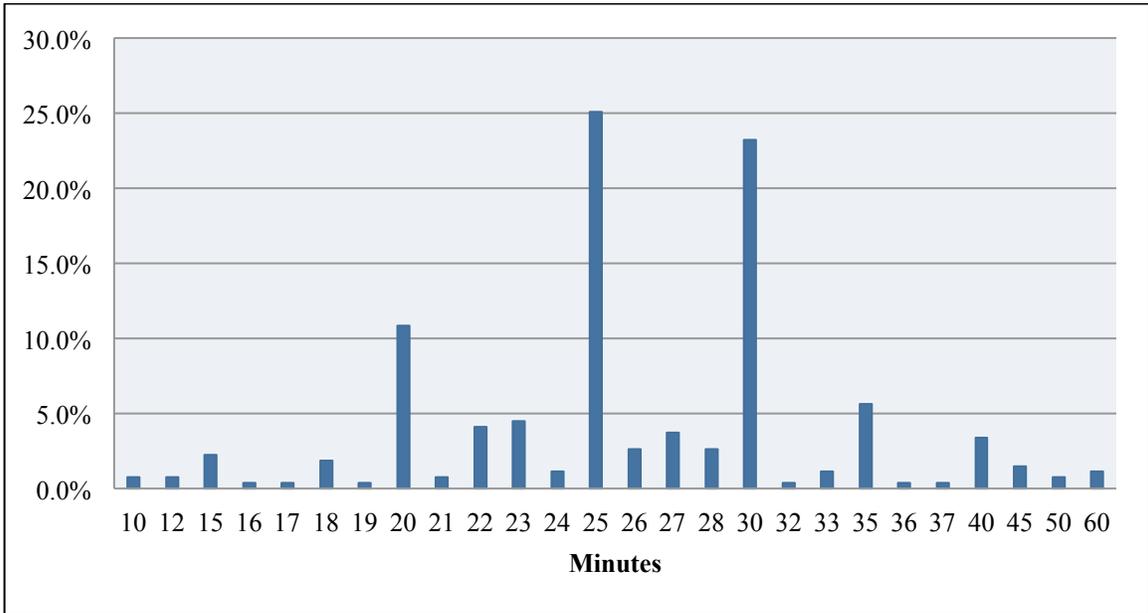


Figure A8. How long is the portion of your most attended worship service prior to the sermon? (Q11)

12. Which of these descriptors characterize your most attended worship service on a typical weekend (recognizing that many of the following terms often have a variety of definitions)? Select all that apply.

- Traditional Modern Contemporary Blended Contemplative
 Convergent Seeker Folk Indie Physically Expressive
 Multi-Generational Demographically targeted (i.e., a specific age group or cultural subset) Neo-liturgical/Historical Confessional Southern Gospel
 Other (please specify)

Table A12. Responses to Q12

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Traditional	40	15.1
Modern	120	45.3
Contemporary	169	63.8
Blended	148	55.8
Contemplative	21	7.9
Convergent	7	2.6
Seeker	31	11.7
Folk	12	4.5
Indie	9	3.4
Physically Expressive	87	32.8
Multi-Generational	180	67.9
Demographically Targeted	21	7.9
Neo-liturgical/Historical	8	3.0
Confessional	13	4.9
Southern Gospel	11	4.2
Other	20	7.5
Count n=	265	

(The response percentage is calculated as a function of total respondents for Q12, n=265)

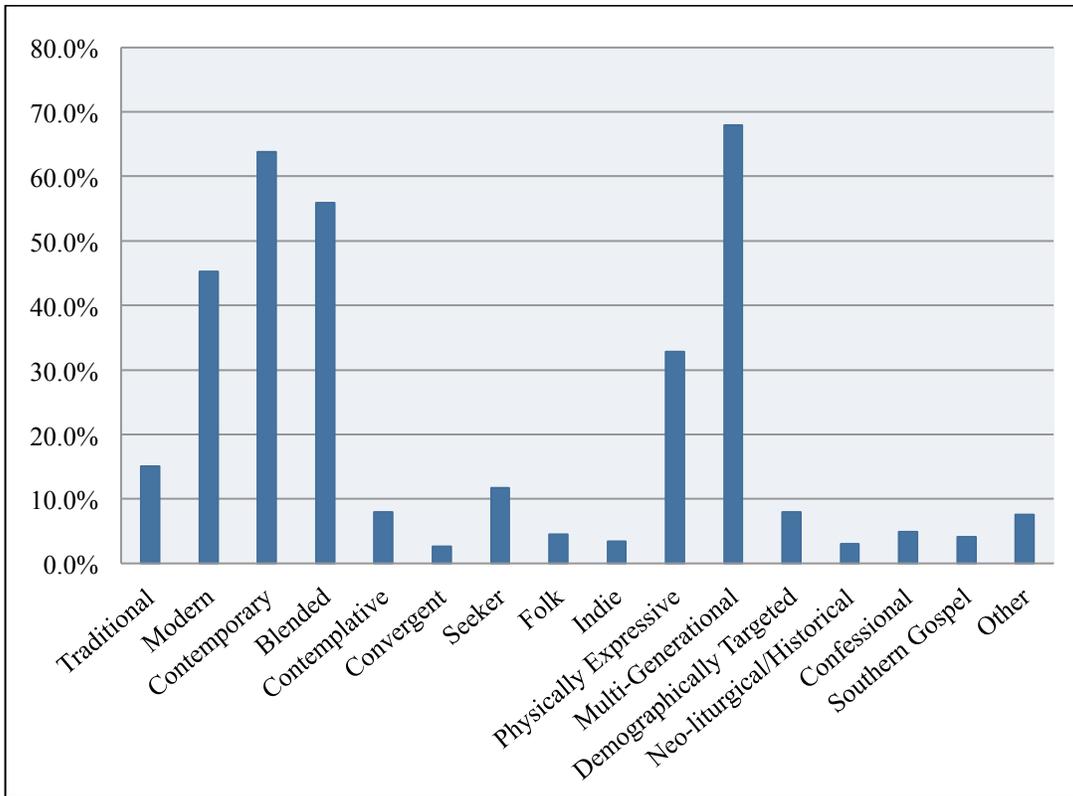


Figure A9. Which of these descriptors characterize your most attended worship service on a typical weekend (recognizing that many of the following terms often have a variety of definitions)? (Q12)

SURVEY PAGE 4

WORSHIP SERVICE ELEMENTS

Just a reminder: all questions concern your MOST ATTENDED worship service on your MAIN campus on a TYPICAL weekend.

13. What elements are typically included in your most attended worship service prior to the message/sermon? Check all that apply.

- Welcome/Greeting (pastoral) Announcements Congregational Singing
 Prayer Scripture Reading Baptism Lord's Supper
 Video/Media Elements Prayer for the Offering Receiving of the Offering
 Choir Anthem Vocal Solos or Small Ensembles Drama/Dramatic Readings
 Dance/Liturgical Dance Personal Testimonies Call to Worship (Spoken)
 Call to Worship (Sung) Greeting One Another During the Service
 Other (please specify _____)

Table A13. Responses to Q13

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Welcoming/Greeting (Pastoral)	236	88.4
Announcements	183	68.5
Congregational Singing	257	96.3
Prayer	235	88.0
Scripture Reading	146	54.7
Baptisms	185	69.3
Lord's Supper	56	21.0
Video/Media Elements	210	78.7
Prayer for the Offering	160	59.9
Receiving of the Offering	179	67.0
Choir Anthem	132	49.4
Vocal Solos or Small Ensembles	111	41.6
Drama/Dramatic Readings	20	7.5
Dance/Liturgical Dance	12	4.5

Table A13—Continued. Responses to Q13

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Personal Testimonies	56	21.0
Call to Worship (Spoken)	54	20.2
Call to Worship (Sung)	88	33.0
Greeting One Another	214	80.1
Count n=	267	

(The response percentage is calculated as a function of total respondents for Q13, n=267)

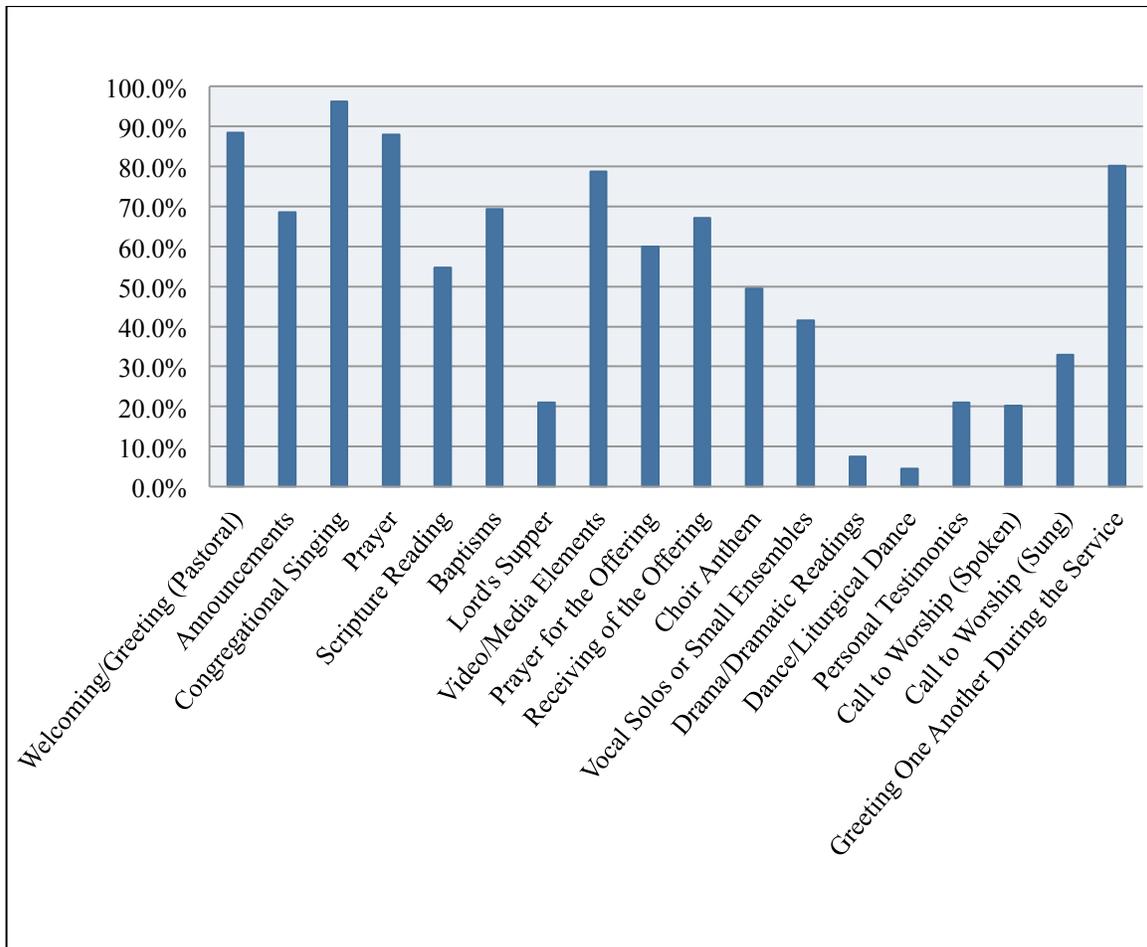


Figure A10. What elements are typically included in your most attended worship service prior to the message/sermon? (Q13)

14. On average, how many congregational songs are included in your most attended worship service PRIOR to the sermon/message?

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ 8 ___ 9 ___ 10

___ Other (please specify _____)

Table A14. Responses to Q14

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
1 Song	3	1.1
2 Songs	8	3.0
3 Songs	67	25.2
4 Songs	127	47.7
5 Songs	50	18.8
6 Songs	10	3.8
7 Songs	1	0.4
Count n=	266	

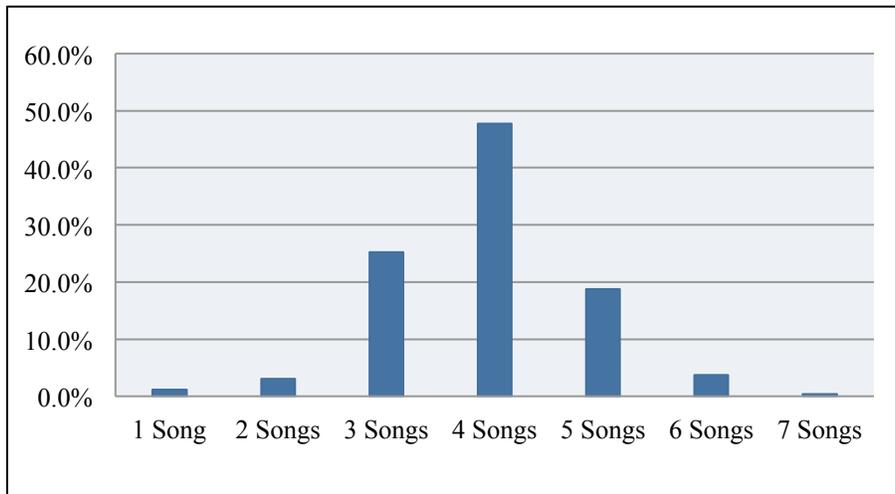


Figure A11. On average, how many congregational songs are included in your most attended worship service prior to the sermon/message? (Q14)

**15. Who is typically involved in leading your most attended worship service?
Please select all that apply.**

- A single worship leader (not playing an instrument)
- A single worship leader playing guitar
- A single worship leader playing a keyboard/piano
- 1-3 additional singers (sometimes called a “praise team”)
- 4-6 additional singers (sometimes called a “praise team”)
- A small worship-leading ensemble (10-20 singers)
- A choir that occasionally sings anthems (“choir specials”)
- A choir that regularly sings anthems (“choir specials”)
- A choir that rarely sings anthems
- Vocal soloists Band (drums/guitar--based rhythm section)
- Orchestra Piano Organ
- Other (please specify)

Table A15. Responses to Q15

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Worship Leader (not playing an instrument)	164	61.7
Worship Leader (playing guitar)	119	44.7
Worship Leader (playing piano/keys)	58	21.8
Praise Team (1-3 singers)	93	35.0
Praise Team (4-6 singers)	128	48.1
Worship-Leading Ensemble (10-20 singers)	15	5.6
Choir (sings anthems occasionally)	46	17.3
Choir (sings anthems regularly)	117	44.0

Table A15—Continued. Responses to Q15

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Choir (sings anthems rarely)	24	9.0
Vocal soloists	109	41.0
Band/Rhythm Section	226	85.0
Orchestra	125	47.0
Piano	169	63.5
Organ	68	25.6
Count n=	266	

(The response percentage is calculated as a function of total respondents for Q15, n=266)

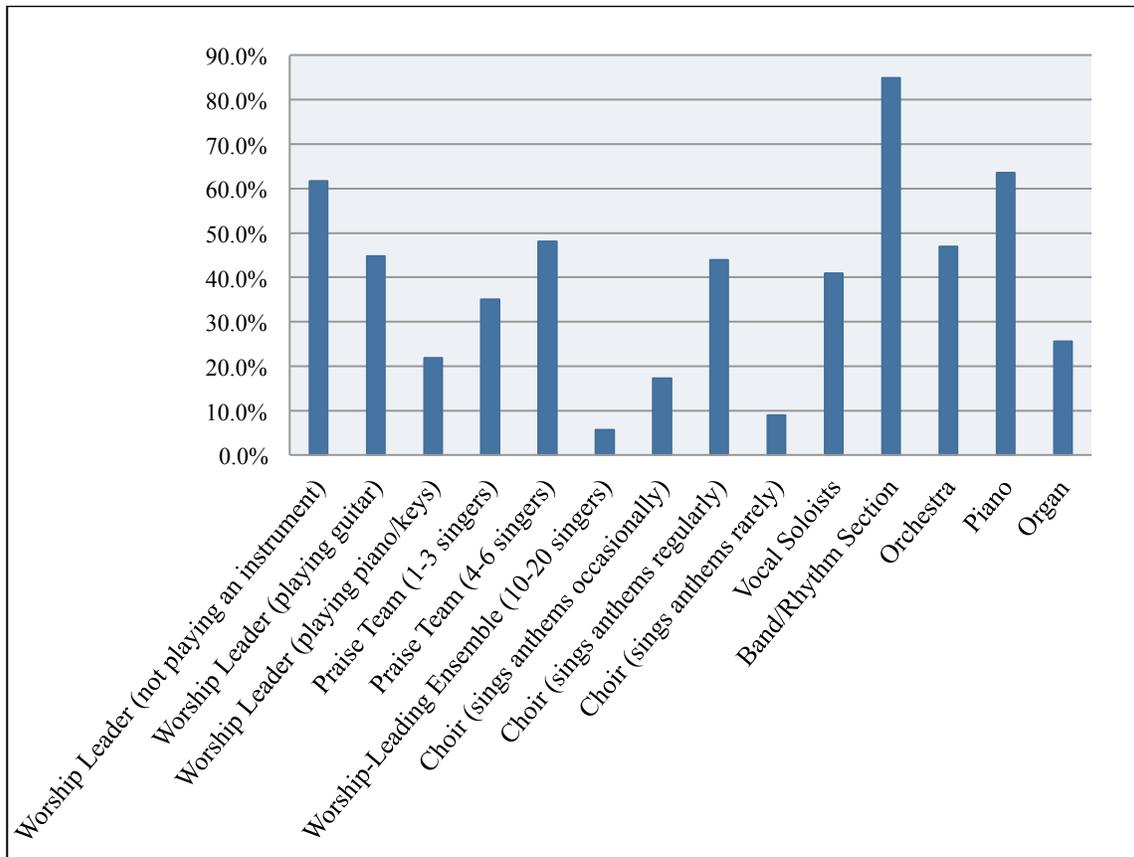


Figure A12. Who is typically involved in leading your most attended worship service? (Q15)

SURVEY PAGE 5

HOW WORSHIP ELEMENTS ARE SELECTED

Just a reminder: all questions concern your MOST ATTENDED worship service on your MAIN campus on a TYPICAL weekend.

16. The next question is about how or why you select the elements that will be included in your worship service. Specifically, what are the goals, values, or objectives that influence your selection process? Please rank each of the following goals/values/objectives on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 indicating no influence and 5 indicating the strongest influence on how/why you select elements that will comprise your worship service.

- 1 - No Influence
- 2 - Slight Influence
- 3 - Moderate Influence

- 4 - Strong Influence
- 5 - Very Strong Influence

Popularity of a song based on rankings from Praise Charts, Planning Center, CCLI, etc.

1 2 3 4 5

The song's style, key, tempo, or singability

1 2 3 4 5

To call the saved to holiness and repentance

1 2 3 4 5

To connect with the culture

1 2 3 4 5

To convey God's transcendence (his distinction and separateness from his people)

1 2 3 4 5

To honor the congregation's expectations, preferences and traditions

1 2 3 4 5

To support the theme of the pastor's sermon or series

1 2 3 4 5

To call the lost to repentance, salvation, and faith

1 2 3 4 5

To celebrate/rehearse the gospel (Christ lived, Christ died, Christ rose again, Christ is coming again)

1 2 3 4 5

To convey God’s immanence (his love, care, and concern for his people)

1 2 3 4 5

To engage the heart and express human emotion (e.g., joy, celebration, contrition, desperation, thanksgiving, awe, wonder, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5

To stimulate the mind with theologically rich content

1 2 3 4 5

Other (please specify _____)

1 2 3 4 5

Table A16. Responses to Q16

<i>Influential Goals, Values, or Objectives</i>	<i>No Influence</i>		<i>Slight Influence</i>		<i>Moderate Influence</i>		<i>Strong Influence</i>		<i>Very Strong Influence</i>		<i>Count n=</i>
	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	
Popularity of a song	85	32.0	79	29.7	60	22.6	36	13.5	6	2.3	266
Song’s style, key, tempo	4	1.5	12	4.5	52	19.5	134	50.2	65	24.3	267
To call the lost to repentance	6	2.3	30	11.3	70	26.4	100	37.7	59	22.3	265
To call the saved to holiness	3	1.1	17	6.4	53	19.9	126	47.4	67	25.2	266
To celebrate/rehearse the gospel	2	0.8	5	1.9	26	9.8	100	37.7	132	49.8	265
To connect with culture	12	4.5	58	21.7	99	37.1	79	29.6	19	7.1	267
To convey God’s immanence	2	0.8	6	2.3	34	12.8	129	48.5	95	35.7	266
To convey God’s transcendence	10	3.7	28	10.5	66	24.7	98	36.7	65	24.3	267
To engage the heart	3	1.1	5	1.9	45	16.9	111	41.7	102	38.3	266
To honor traditions	36	13.6	88	33.2	100	37.7	31	11.7	10	3.8	265
To theologically stimulate the mind	15	5.6	15	5.6	80	30.1	98	36.8	58	21.8	266

Table A16—Continued. Responses to Q16

<i>Influential Goals, Values, or Objectives</i>	<i>No Influence</i>		<i>Slight Influence</i>		<i>Moderate Influence</i>		<i>Strong Influence</i>		<i>Very Strong Influence</i>		<i>Count n=</i>
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
To support the sermon series/theme	8	3.0	40	15.2	57	21.6	86	32.6	73	27.7	264
Other ¹	6	2.2	2	0.7	7	2.6	9	3.4	16	6.0	40 (267)

(The first number in each category represents the number of responses. The second number represents the response percentage calculated as a function of “count.”)

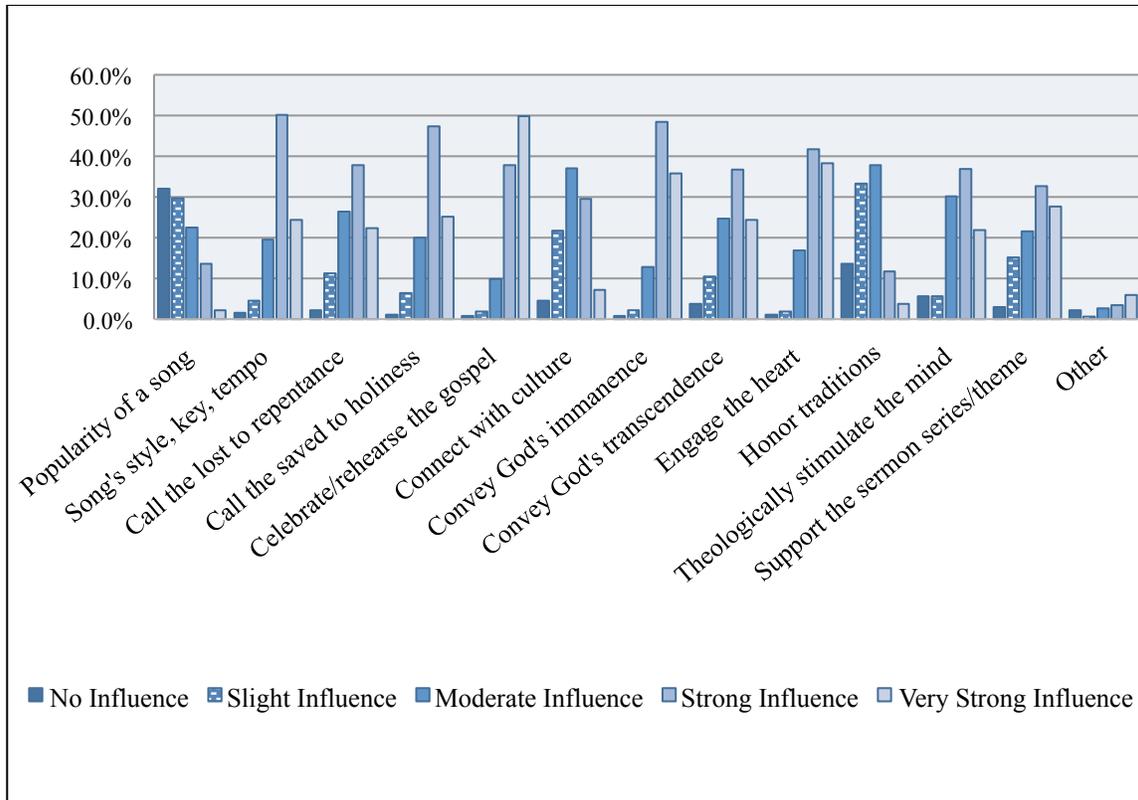


Figure A13. What are the goals, values, or objectives that influence your selection process? (Q16)

¹For a clearer representation of this category, the percentages for “Other” have been calculated using n=267 rather than n=40. The decision to use n=267 was based upon a total of 267 worship pastors who responded to this question.

17. Thinking about your responses to the previous question, what factors most influence your worship planning?

[The responder was provided drop-down boxes with the same answer choices listed in Q16 to select the goals, values, or objectives that most influence worship planning.]

Table A17. Responses to Q17

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Most Influential</i>		<i>2nd Most Influential</i>		<i>3rd Most Influential</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Popularity of a song	2	0.8	3	1.1	6	2.3
Song's style, key, tempo	12	4.5	36	13.7	59	22.4
Call the lost to repentance	11	4.1	21	8.0	12	4.6
Call the saved to holiness	8	3.0	17	6.5	14	5.3
Celebrate/rehearse the gospel	97	36.5	38	14.4	15	5.7
Connect with culture	2	0.8	12	4.6	23	8.7
Convey God's immanence	20	7.5	24	9.1	29	11.0
Convey God's transcendence	2	0.8	9	3.4	11	4.2
Engage the heart	45	16.9	48	18.3	36	13.7
Honor traditions	0	0.0	5	1.9	7	2.7
Theologically stimulate the mind	7	2.6	20	7.6	22	8.4
Support the sermon series/theme	48	18.0	28	10.6	27	10.3
Other	12	4.5	2	0.8	2	0.8
Count n=	266		263		263	

(The first number in each category represents the number of responses. The second number represents the response percentage calculated as a function of "count.")

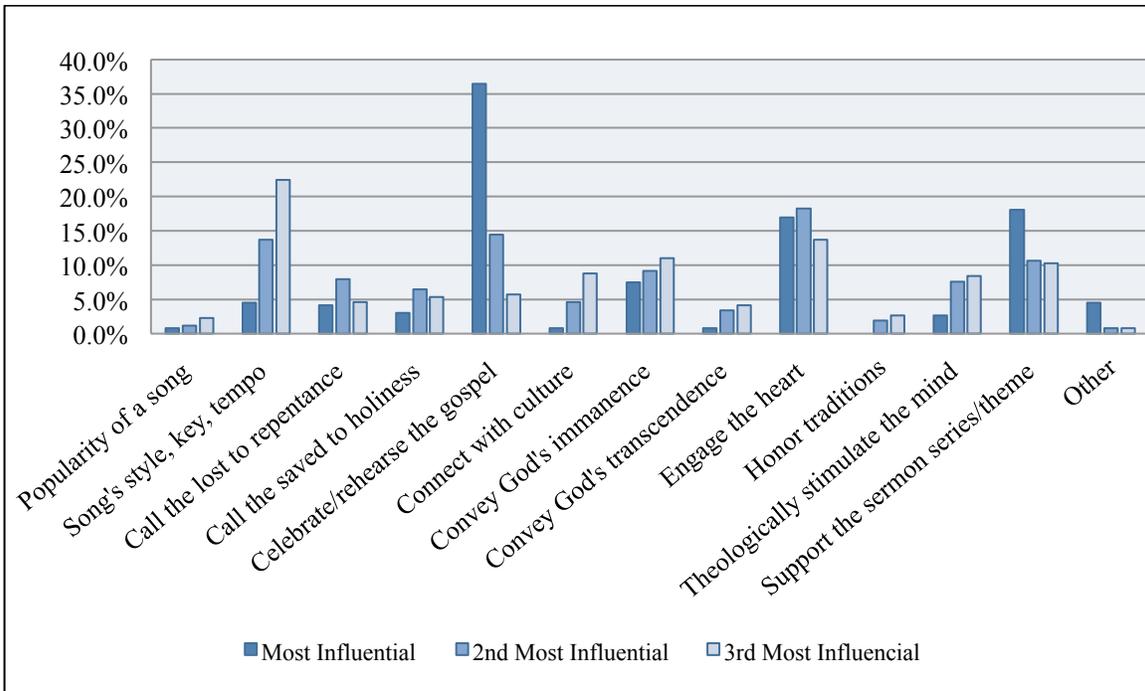


Figure A14. What are the goals, values, or objectives that most influence your selection process? (Q17)

SURVEY PAGE 6

WORSHIP SERVICE BEGINNINGS

Just a reminder: all questions concern your MOST ATTENDED worship service on your MAIN campus on a TYPICAL weekend.

18. Worship service beginnings: please characterize the focus of the elements that most often occur within the first 5-10 minutes of your most attended service.

- 1 - Never
- 2 - Rarely
- 3 - Sometimes
- 4 - Frequently
- 5 - Always

Dedication/Commitment

1 2 3 4 5

Confession/Repentance

1 2 3 4 5

Announcements/Greetings/Verbal Intros

1 2 3 4 5

Adoration/Celebration of God's love and care for his creation (immanence)

1 2 3 4 5

Contemplation/Reflection

1 2 3 4 5

Thanksgiving

1 2 3 4 5

Adoration/Celebration of God's distinction and separateness from his people/creation (transcendence)

1 2 3 4 5

Adoration/Celebration of Christ, the cross, and the Gospel

1 2 3 4 5

Other (please specify _____)

1 2 3 4 5

Table A18. Responses to Q18

<i>Worship Service Beginnings</i>	<i>Never</i>		<i>Rarely</i>		<i>Sometimes</i>		<i>Frequently</i>		<i>Always</i>		<i>Count n=</i>
	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	
Dedication/ Commitment	38	15.5	102	41.6	67	27.3	32	13.1	6	2.4	245
Confession/ Repentance	43	17.3	116	46.8	64	25.8	20	8.1	5	2.0	248
Announcements/ Greetings	16	6.2	37	14.3	38	14.7	61	23.6	106	41.1	258
Adoration/ Celebration of God's Immanence	1	0.4	4	1.6	56	21.7	150	58.1	47	18.2	258
Contemplation/ Reflection	27	11.1	108	44.3	78	32.0	25	10.2	6	2.5	244
Thanksgiving	2	0.8	10	3.9	70	27.2	143	55.6	32	12.5	257
Adoration/ Celebration of God's Transcendence	5	1.9	26	10.0	61	23.5	130	50.0	38	14.6	260
Adoration/ Celebration of the Gospel	0	0.0	6	2.3	33	12.6	158	60.5	64	24.5	261
Other ²	3	1.1	1	0.4	2	0.8	10	3.8	7	2.6	23 (265)

(The first number in each category represents the number of responses.
The second number represents the response percentage
calculated as a function of “count.”)

²For a clearer representation of this category, the percentages for “Other” have been calculated using n=265 rather than n=23. The decision to use n=265 was based upon a total of 265 worship pastors of 267 who responded to this question.

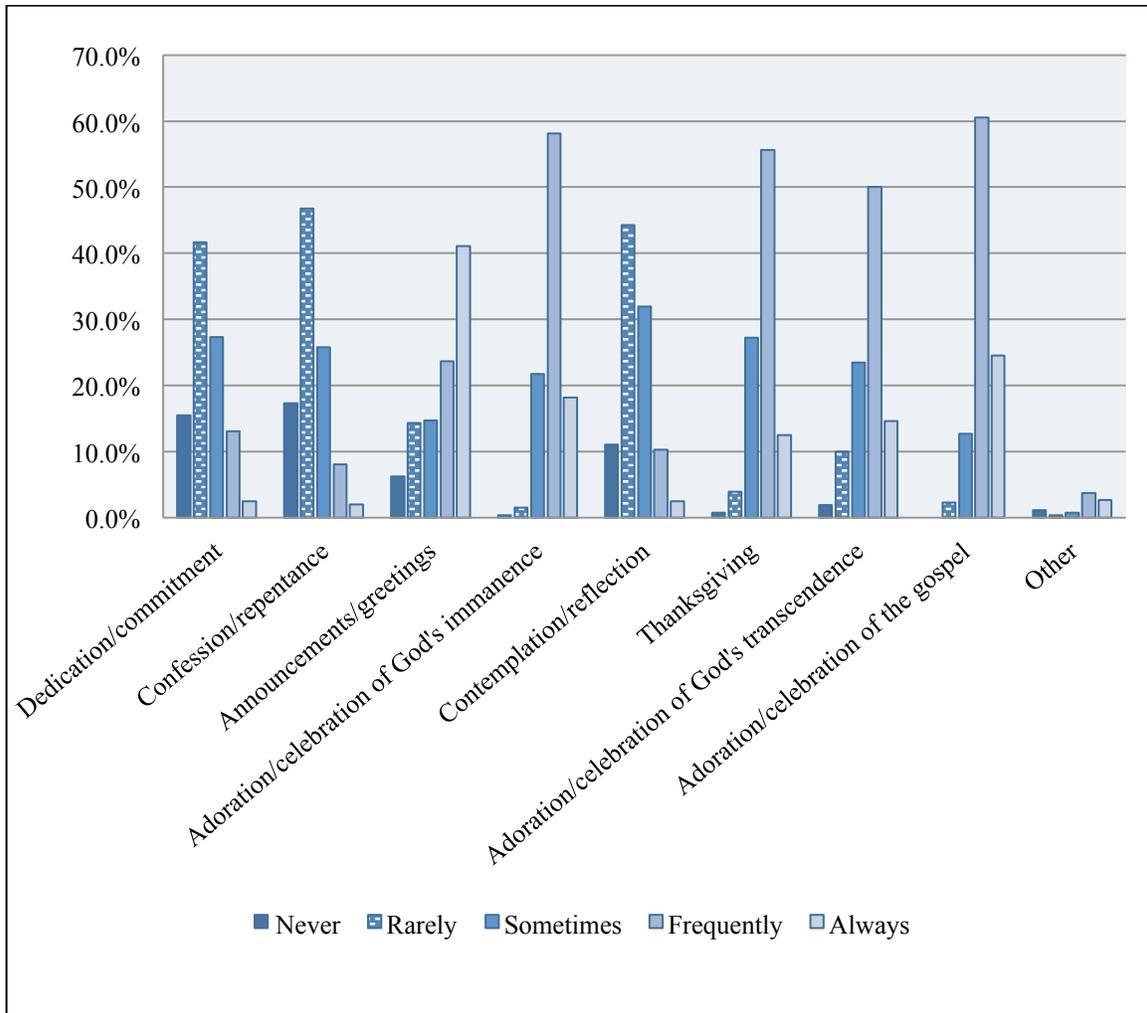


Figure A15. Worship service beginnings: please characterize the focus of the elements that most often occur within the first 5-10 minutes of your most attended service (Q18)

19. When is Scripture typically read during the portion of the worship service that precedes the message? Check all that apply.

Near or at the beginning (e.g., within the first 10 minutes)

The middle (e.g., minutes 11-20)

Near the end (e.g., minutes 21-30)

Scripture is typically only read during the message

Other (please specify _____)

Table A19. Responses to Q19

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Near or at the beginning (e.g., within the first 10 minutes)	97	37.3
The middle (e.g., minutes 11-20)	131	50.4
Near the end (e.g., minutes 21-30)	56	21.5
Scripture is typically only read during the message	78	30.0
Other	25	9.6
Count n=	260	

(The response percentage is calculated as a function of total respondents for Q19, n=260)

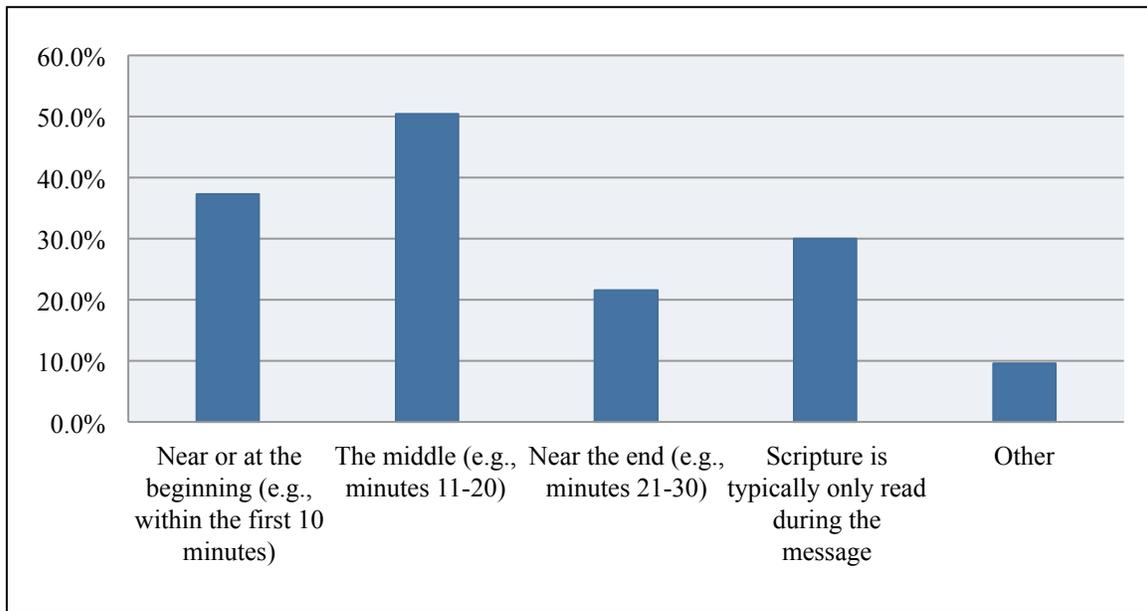


Figure A16. When is Scripture typically read during the portion of the worship service that precedes the message? (Q19)

20. If Scripture is read at or near the beginning of your worship service (within the first 10 minutes), please check the kind of passage that most often describes the flavor/theme/focus of that Scripture:

Scripture that points toward God’s nearness and/or his care and provision for his creation: for example, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet 5:7) or “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb 13:5b) or “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28).

Scripture of adoration and praise: for example, “Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!” (Ps 98:1) or “Praise the Lord! Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!” (Ps 106:1) or “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs” (Ps 100:1).

Scripture that focuses on Christ and his gospel: for example, “Therefore, having been justified out of faith, we have peace toward God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1) or “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:8) or “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

Scripture that conveys God’s distinction and separateness from his creation: for example, “. . . I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst” (Hos 11:9b) or “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth. . . . He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in” (Isa 40:22) or “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!” (Job 38:4-5b).

No generalizations can be made about the kind of Scripture passages we commonly choose to read at or near the beginning of a worship service.

We do not typically include Scripture reading at or near the beginning of a worship service.

Other (please specify _____)

Table A20. Responses to Q20

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Scripture that points to God’s nearness (immanence)	6	3.5
Scripture of adoration and praise	81	47.1

Table A20—Continued. Responses to Q20

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Scripture that focuses on Christ and his gospel	15	8.7
Scripture that conveys God’s distinction (transcendence)	10	5.8
No generalizations can be made	60	34.9
Count n= ³	172	

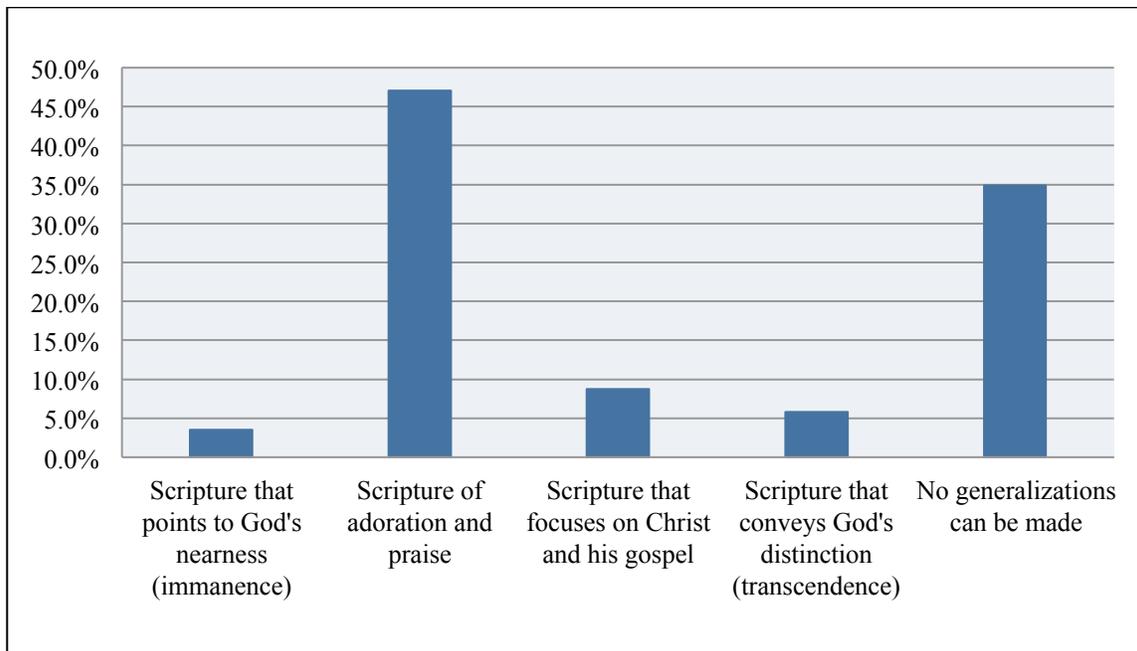


Figure A17. If Scripture is read at or near the beginning of your worship service (within the first 10 minutes), please check the kind of passage that most often describes the flavor/theme/focus of that Scripture (Q20)

³Table A20 does not include an additional 41 responses to the answer choice, “We do not typically include Scripture reading at or near the beginning of a worship service.”

21. As you plan a worship service, what do you most often [2nd most often, 3rd most often] convey about God?

[The responders were given the options listed below in a drop-down box.]

- His greatness and glory
- His grace and mercy
- His sovereignty and majesty
- His faithfulness
- His holiness
- His kindness and love
- His compassion and forgiveness
- His provision and trustworthiness
- His splendor and grandeur
- His closeness and intimacy
- His omnipotence and eternity
- His separateness and distinction
- Other

Table A21. Responses to Q21

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Most Often</i>		<i>2nd Most Often</i>		<i>3rd Most Often</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
His greatness and glory	113	44.0	34	13.2	15	5.8
His grace and mercy	43	16.7	71	27.6	46	17.9
His sovereignty and majesty	27	10.5	25	9.7	20	7.8
His faithfulness	19	7.4	33	12.8	48	18.7
His holiness	17	6.6	14	5.4	17	6.6
His kindness and love	10	3.9	16	6.2	25	9.7
His compassion and forgiveness	9	3.5	28	10.9	27	10.5
His provision and trustworthiness	7	2.7	9	3.5	22	8.6
His splendor and grandeur	6	2.3	11	4.3	14	5.4
His closeness and intimacy	3	1.2	8	3.1	17	6.6

Table A21—Continued. Responses to Q21

His omnipotence and eternity	2	0.8	7	2.7	3	1.2
His separateness and distinction	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.8
Other	1	0.4	1	0.4	1	0.4
Count n=	257		257		257	

(The first number in each category represents the number of responses. The second number represents the response percentage calculated as a function of “count”)

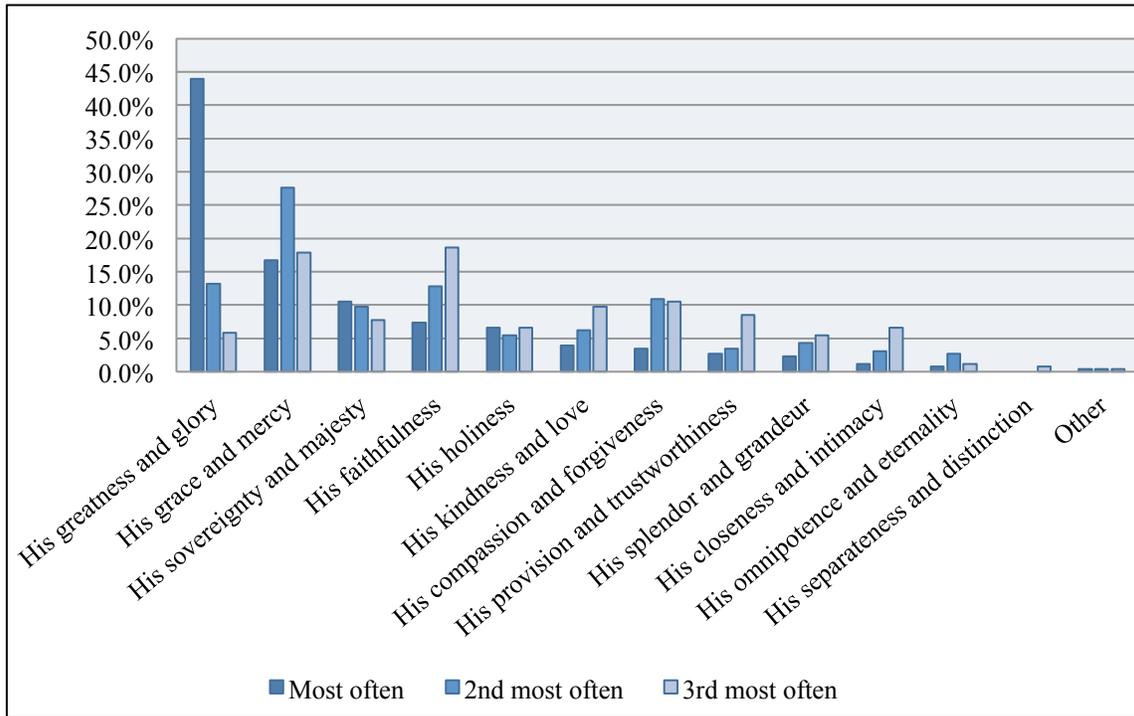


Figure A18. As you plan a worship service, what do you most often convey about God? (Q21)

SURVEY PAGE 7

SEQUENTIAL ORDERING OF WORSHIP SERVICE ELEMENTS

Just a reminder: all questions concern your MOST ATTENDED worship service on your MAIN campus on a TYPICAL weekend.

22. The drop down list below displays factors that may influence how you ORDER or SEQUENCE elements in your worship service. Please indicate the top three most influential factors that impact how you ORDER or SEQUENCE a worship service?

Factors that may influence order or sequence:

Most Influential Factor [drop-down box]

2rd Most Influential Factor [drop-down box]

3nd Most Influential Factor [drop-down box]

[drop-down box options]

Tempo (of a song)

Style (of a song)

Key (or key relationships)

Traditions of your church

The concept of revelation-response

Historic or neo-liturgical formats (e.g., Adoration—Confession—Thanksgiving—Petition)

A movement from fast/celebrative to slower/contemplative

A movement from slower/contemplative to fast/celebrative

A movement from conveying God's transcendence to God's immanence

A movement from conveying God's immanence to God's transcendence

None

Other (Please specify _____)

Table A22. Responses to Q22

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Most Influential</i>		<i>2nd Most Influential</i>		<i>3rd Most Influential</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Tempo	31	11.8	40	15.7	13	5.2
Style	15	5.7	40	15.7	42	16.9
Key or key relationships	3	1.1	36	14.2	56	22.5
Traditions of your church	14	5.3	13	5.1	14	5.6
Revelation-response	31	11.8	29	11.4	25	10.0
Historic or neo-liturgical formats	14	5.3	7	2.8	12	4.8
Fast to slow	108	41.2	52	20.5	22	8.8
Slower to fast	1	0.4	5	2.0	7	2.8
Immanence to transcendence	11	4.2	9	3.5	9	3.6
Transcendence to immanence	8	3.1	9	3.5	15	6.0
None	6	2.3	7	2.8	20	8.0
Other	20	7.6	7	2.8	14	5.6
Count n=	262		254		249	

(The first number in each category represents the number of responses.
The second number represents the response percentage
calculated as a function of “count.”)

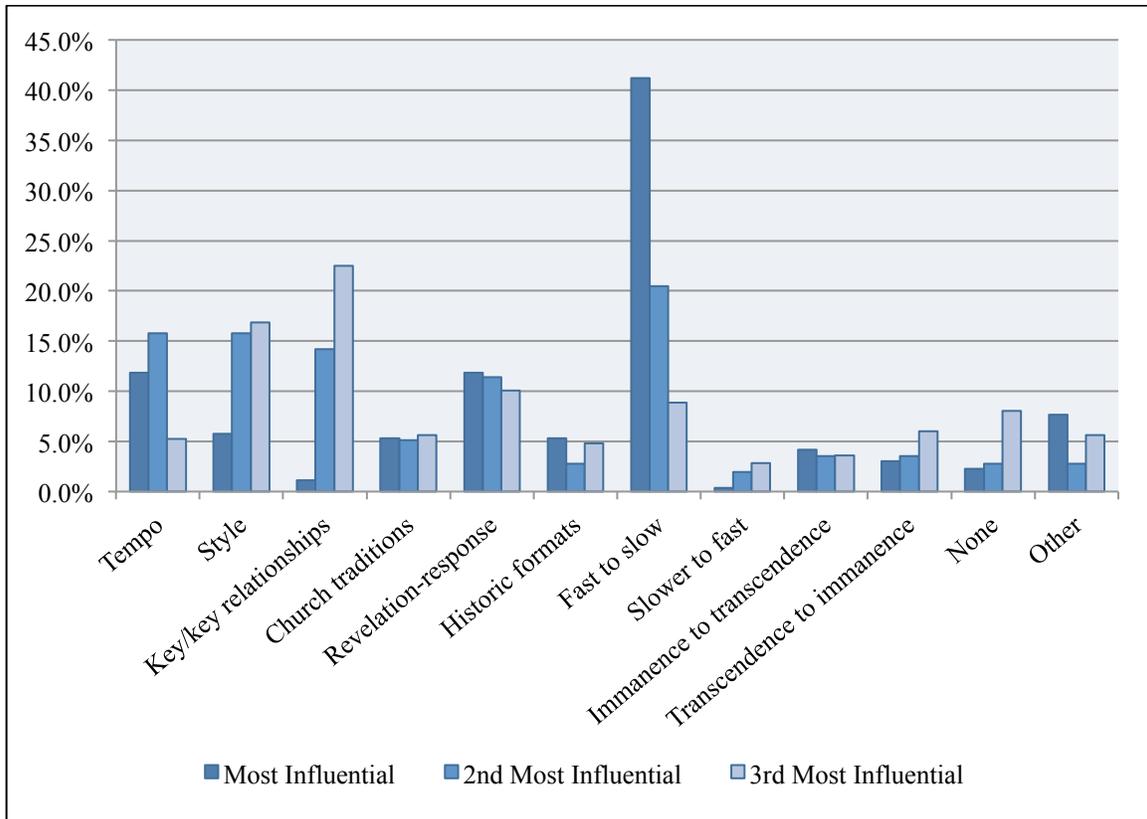


Figure A19. Top three most influential factors that impact order and sequence of the worship service (Q22)

24. The content of the FIRST (SECOND, THIRD, etc.) congregational song is most often like . . .⁴

___ “This Is Amazing Grace,” “Happy Day,” “All I Have Is Christ,” or “Victory in Jesus” (songs about the redeeming work of Christ)

___ “Whom Shall I Fear,” “Friend of God,” “One Thing Remains,” or “The Love of God” (songs about God’s nearness, love, and care for his children)

___ “Power of the Cross,” “In Christ Alone,” “Glorious Day,” or “Hallelujah, What a Savior” (songs depicting the cross/Gospel)

___ “Holy, Holy, Holy,” “God of Wonders,” “Behold Our God,” or “Indescribable” (songs that convey God’s separateness and distinction from creation)

⁴The data from Q23 is included in Q24. Q23 read, “The content of the FIRST congregational song is most often like . . .”

___ “10,000 Reasons,” “All Creatures of Our God and King,” or “Here I Am to Worship” (songs that express or encourage exaltation)

___ “Lord, I Need You,” “Just As I Am,” “Give Us Clean Hands,” or “Take My Life, and Let It Be” (songs that express repentance/consecration)

___ “Thanks Be To Our God,” “Jesus, Thank You,” or “How Great Is the Love” (songs that express thanksgiving)

___ Other (please specify _____)

___ No general characterizations can be made

Table A23. Responses to Q24⁵

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>1st Song</i>		<i>2nd Song</i>		<i>3rd Song</i>		<i>4th Song</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Songs about the redeeming work of Christ	98	36.8	48	18.0	20	7.5	10	3.8
Songs about God’s nearness, love, and care for his children (immanence)	14	5.3	68	25.6	38	14.3	20	7.5
Songs depicting the cross/gospel	2	0.8	16	6.0	46	17.3	29	10.9
Songs that convey God’s separateness and distinction from creation (transcendence)	31	11.7	23	8.6	19	7.1	14	5.3
Songs that express or encourage exaltation	46	17.3	33	12.4	47	17.7	22	8.3
Songs that express repentance/consecration	0	0.0	5	1.9	17	6.4	65	24.4
Songs that express thanksgiving	7	2.6	10	3.8	12	4.5	17	6.4
Other	19	7.1	4	1.5	2	0.8	5	1.9
No general characterizations can be made	49	18.4	38	14.3	37	13.9	37	13.9
Count n=	266		245		238		219	

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>5th Song</i>		<i>6th Song</i>		<i>7th Song</i>		<i>8th Song</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Songs about the redeeming work of Christ	4	1.5	3	1.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Songs about God’s nearness, love, and care for his children (immanence)	12	4.5	1	0.4	2	0.8	1	0.4

⁵The data from Q23 is also included in table A23.

Table A23—Continued. Responses to Q24

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>5th Song</i>		<i>6th Song</i>		<i>7th Song</i>		<i>8th Song</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Songs depicting the cross/gospel	18	6.8	5	1.9	2	0.8	0	0.0
Songs that convey God’s separateness and distinction from creation (transcendence)	5	1.9	0	0.0	4	1.5	1	0.4
Songs that express or encourage exaltation	12	4.5	5	1.9	1	0.4	1	0.4
Songs that express repentance/consecration	38	14.3	16	6.0	8	3.0	6	2.3
Songs that express thanksgiving	9	3.4	12	4.5	3	1.1	2	0.8
Other	2	0.8	2	0.8	1	0.4	2	0.8
No general characterizations can be made	33	12.4	29	10.9	29	10.9	29	10.9
Count n= ⁶	133		73		50		42	

(The first number in each category represents the number of responses. The second number represents the response percentage calculated as a function of total respondents to Q24, n=266)

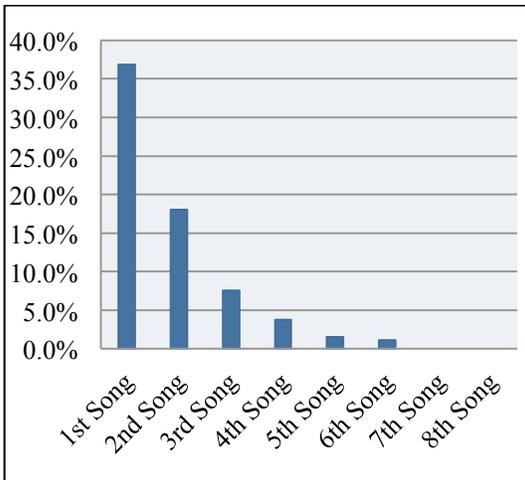


Figure A20. Songs about the redeeming work of Christ (Q24)

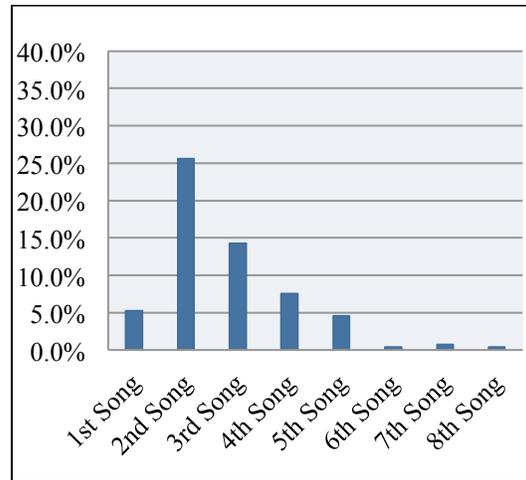


Figure A21. Songs about God’s nearness, love, and care for his children (immanence) (Q24)

⁶ The percentage calculations in table A23 are based on n=266, the total number of respondents to Q24, rather than the varying number of responses to each song’s ordinal placement.

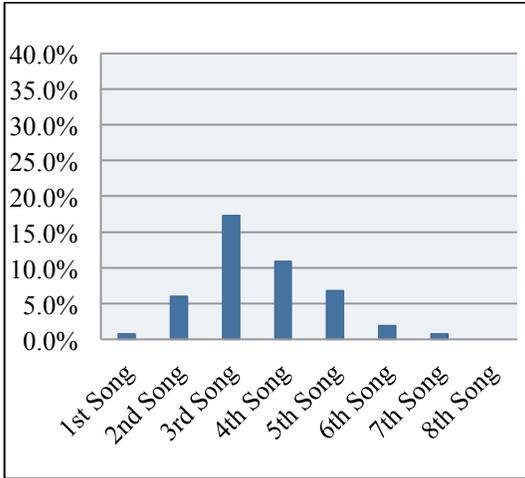


Figure A22. Songs depicting the cross/gospel (Q24)

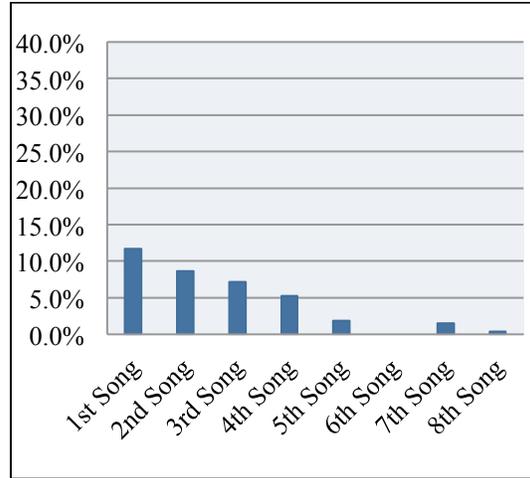


Figure A23. Songs that convey God's separateness and distinction from creation (transcendence) (Q24)

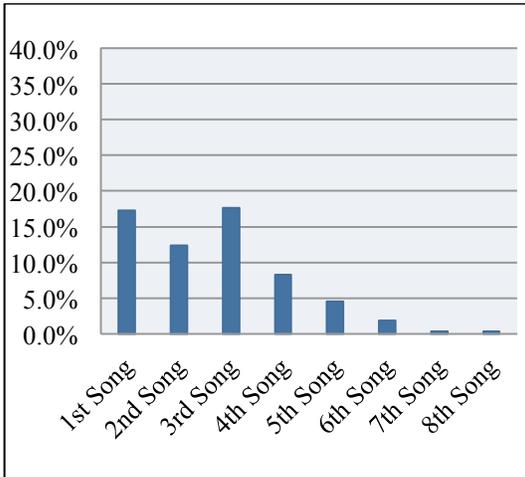


Figure A24. Songs that express or encourage exaltation (Q24)

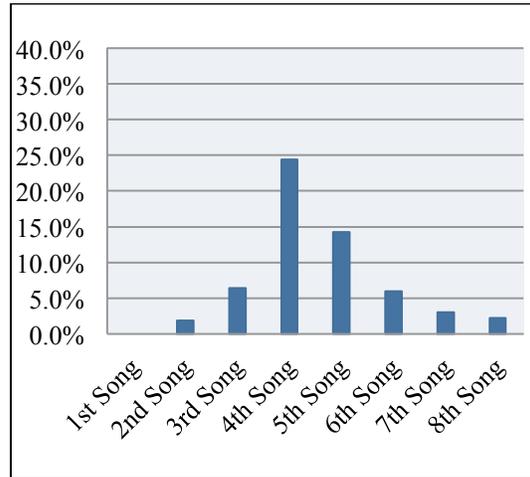


Figure A25. Songs that express repentance/consecration (Q24)

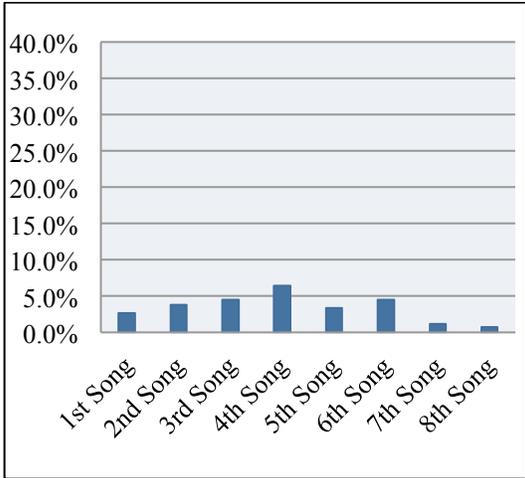


Figure A26. Songs that express thanksgiving (Q24)

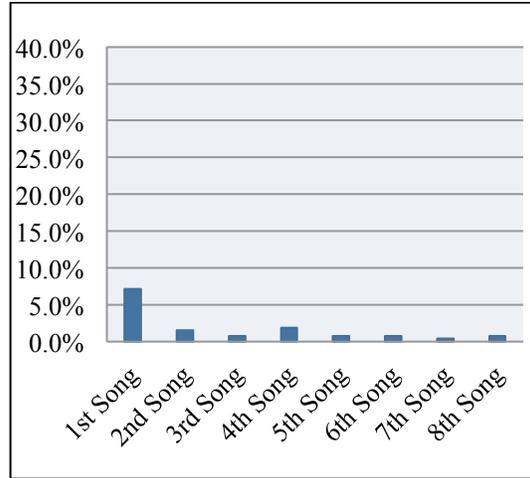


Figure A27. Other (Q24)

25. How frequently do you celebrate the Lord’s Supper at your most attended service?

Weekly Monthly Quarterly Yearly Other (please specify _____)

Table A24.
Responses to Q25

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Weekly	13	5.6
Monthly	50	21.5
Quarterly	159	68.2
Yearly	11	4.7
Count n=	233	

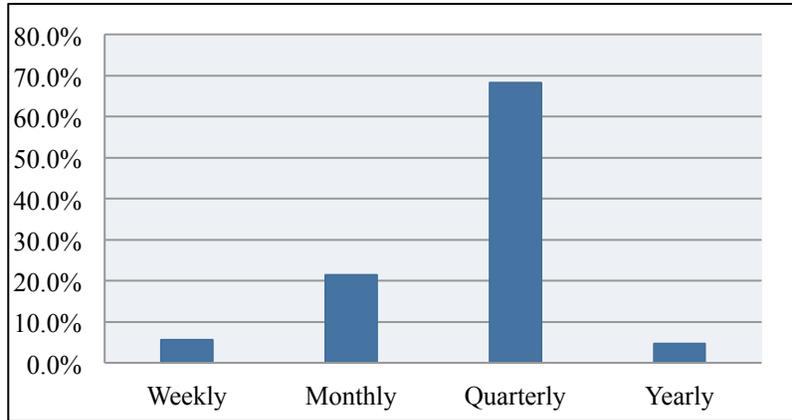


Figure A28. How frequently do you celebrate the Lord's Supper at your most attended service? (Q25)

SURVEY PAGE 8

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Please take a moment and tell me a little bit about you.

26. How long have you served in your current church specifically in the area of music and worship ministry?

Less than 1 year 1 year 2 years 3 years... 25+ years

Table A25. Responses to Q26

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
0-5 Years	100	37.6
6-10 Years	74	27.8
11-15 Years	46	17.3
16-20 Years	17	6.4
21+ Years	29	10.9
Count n=	266	

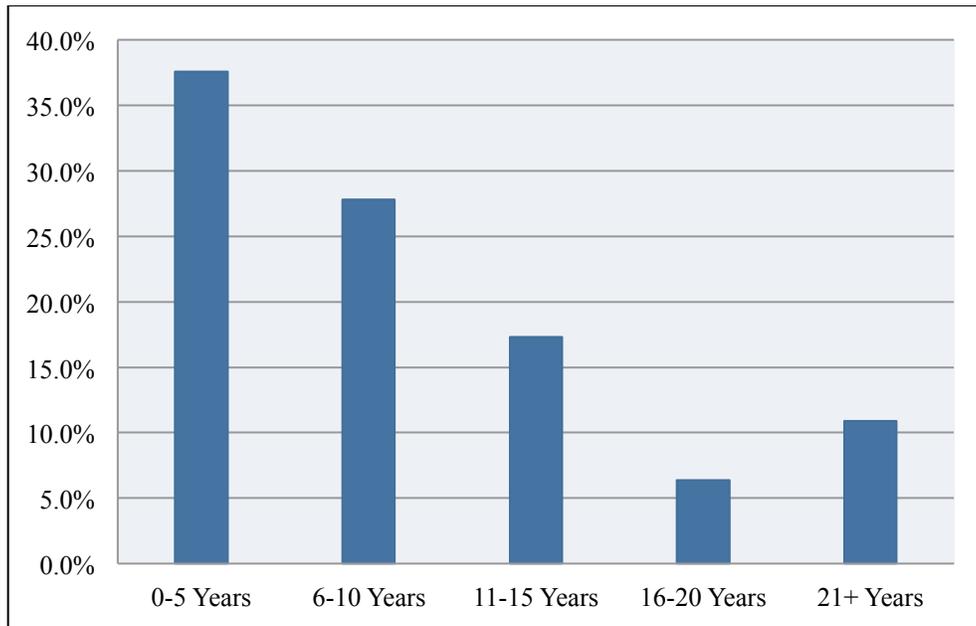


Figure A29. How long have you served in your current church specifically in the area of music and worship ministry? (Q26)

27. How many years have passed since you began your first full-time position as minister of music (including combined positions like music/youth or music/administration, etc.)? [*Special Note:* For clarity of reporting, Q27 was reworded to read as indicated above. However, Q27 originally read as follows: “What year did you begin your FIRST full-time position as a minister of music (including combined positions like music/youth or music/administration, etc.)?” Responses were initially given by worship pastors as a calendar year. For the purposes of reporting in table A26 and figure A30, the researcher has mathematically converted the calendar year to the total number of years since beginning a full-time position as a minister of music.]

Table A26. Responses to Q27

<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
0-5 Years	27	10.2
6-10 Years	42	15.9
11-15 Years	38	14.4
16-20 Years	51	19.3
21-25 Years	29	11.0
26-30 Years	20	7.6
31-35 Years	33	12.5
36-40 Years	18	6.8
41-45 Years	4	1.5
46 Years	2	0.8
Count n=	264	

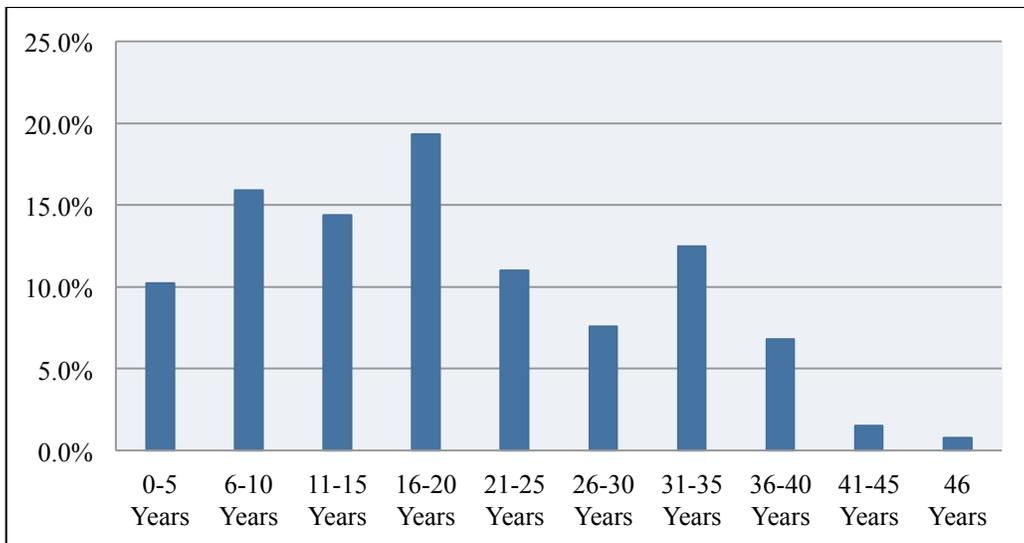


Figure A30. How many years have passed since you began your first full-time position as a minister of music (Q27)

29. BONUS QUESTION! In the past year, what are three new songs that you have introduced to your church that have been well-received?

[The responder was given text boxes in which to type responses]

Song 1 _____

Song 2 _____

Song 3 _____

The following list includes all songs indicated by two or more worship pastors. The number contained in parentheses indicates the number of worship pastors who offered the response indicated.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (47) 10,000 Reasons | (04) Great Are You Lord |
| (41) This Is Amazing Grace | (04) How Great Is Our God |
| (31) Lord I Need You | (04) I Am |
| (27) Oceans | (04) I Will Not Be Shaken |
| (24) Great I Am | (04) Mercy |
| (20) Cornerstone | (04) Mighty Warrior |
| (18) Man of Sorrows | (04) No One Higher |
| (18) Victor's Crown | (04) Redeemed |
| (18) Whom Shall I Fear | (04) The Power of the Cross |
| (17) Forever | (04) This Blood |
| (11) Forever Reign | (04) Your Presence Is Heaven to Me |
| (11) Open up the Heavens | (03) All He Says I Am |
| (09) One Thing Remains | (03) All My Fountains |
| (08) Christ Is Enough | (03) Defender |
| (08) Every Praise | (03) Glorious Day |
| (08) The Lord Our God | (03) Grace So Glorious |
| (07) Alive | (03) He Is Faithful |
| (07) We Believe | (03) I Surrender |
| (06) Behold Our God | (03) Jesus Is Better |
| (06) Build Your Kingdom Here | (03) Just As I Am |
| (06) Your Grace Finds Me | (03) Lay Me Down |
| (05) At the Cross (Love Ran Red) | (03) Never Gonna Let Me Go |
| (05) Christ Is Risen | (03) O the Blood |
| (05) Never Once | (03) Only King Forever |
| (05) Overcome | (03) Relentless |
| (05) Song of Moses | (03) Savior |
| (05) Your Great Name | (03) Speak O Lord |
| (04) All I Have Is Christ | (03) The Great I Am |
| (04) Always | (03) The Same Love |
| (04) At Your Name | (03) Wake |

(03) We Will Remember	(02) Jesus Only Jesus
(03) Worship the Great I Am	(02) Jesus Son of God
(03) Amazing	(02) Love Shines
(02) Absent from Flesh	(02) Made Alive
(02) Awesome	(02) More than Amazing
(02) Burning in My Soul	(02) My Lighthouse
(02) By Faith	(02) Need You
(02) Christ in Me	(02) O Church Arise
(02) Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery	(02) Our God
(02) Come Thou Fount, Come Thou King	(02) Our God Saves
(02) Exalted One	(02) Our Great God
(02) Forever Faithful	(02) Raised to Life
(02) God Is Able	(02) Sinking Deep
(02) God of the Ages	(02) Strong God
(02) Happy Day	(02) Stronger
(02) Here's My Heart	(02) The Rock Won't Move
(02) I Lift My Hands	(02) Thrive
(02) I Will Sing Praise	(02) White Flag
(02) It Is Well	(02) Wide as the Sky
(02) Jesus Messiah	(02) Your Love Never Fails

APPENDIX 2

THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY ETHICS COMMITTEE
APPROVAL



Approvals for Using Human Subjects in Research
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Researcher CHARLES T. LEWIS, JR.
Research Type Student Faculty Institutional
Human Subjects None Ages 17 or Under Ages 18 or Older
Research Title ' FAR AND NEAR: CHRISTIAN WORSHIP OF THE
TRANSCENDENT AND IMMANENT GOD OF WONDERS '

Please initial *each* of the following statements as affirmation of your compliance to the protocol, then sign with your full signature and enter the date signed on the lines provided.

CL I have accurately described the informed consents and levels of risk to human subjects in my study to the best of my ability, and will implement the research protocols as documented, incorporating modifications as required.

CL I understand that if I make changes and/or additions to these protocols, I *must* seek the approval of my Research Supervisor *prior* to the gathering of data with these protocols.

CL I understand that instrumentation developed and/or revised for use with human subjects in the study *must* be approved by my Research Supervisor *prior* to use with human subjects.

Charles T Lewis, Jr
Researcher/Team Representative

5-14-14
Date

SECTION BELOW FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

The documentation of the research protocols submitted by the researcher/research team appropriately informs, acquires consents, and provides accommodations for the projected level/s of risk to human subjects participating in the study . . .

without required modifications. with required modifications as attached.

Bruce A. Blair 5/15/14
Research Supervisor/ Faculty Colleague Date

MSW 5/15/14
Research Ethics Committee Date

SVP Academic Administration Date

Research Ethics Committee Assessment
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Low Risk
<input type="checkbox"/> Medium Risk
<input type="checkbox"/> High Risk

APPENDIX 3

CHURCHES INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
WORSHIP DESIGN PROJECT 2014

The worship pastors of the following 547 churches were invited to participate in the Worship Design Project 2014. These churches represent all Southern Baptist churches in the United States (and one U.S. territory) whose average weekly attendance for the calendar year 2012 was reported by LifeWay as being greater than 1,100. Of the 547 worship pastors invited, 267 successfully responded to the Worship Design Project 2014 survey. The churches of the 267 successful responders are indicated in bold.

121 Community Church	Grapevine	TX
3 Circle Church	Fairhope	AL
Abundant Life Baptist Church	Lees Summit	MO
Alamo City Christian Fellowship	San Antonio	TX
Alice Drive Baptist Church	Sumter	SC
Aloma Church	Winter Park	FL
Anastasia Baptist Church	St Augustine	FL
Anderson Mill Road Baptist	Moore	SC
Anthology Church	Studio City	CA
Antioch Bible Baptist Church	Gladstone	MO
Antioch Fellowship	Dallas	TX
Antioch Missionary Baptist Church	Long Beach	CA
Apex Baptist Church	Apex	NC
Apex Community Church	Kettering	OH
Arran Lake Baptist Church	Fayetteville	NC
Avalon Church	McDonough	GA
Bannockburn Baptist Church	Austin	TX
Bay Area Fellowship	Corpus Christi	TX
Bay Life Church	Brandon	FL
Bayou City Fellowship	Houston	TX
Bayside Baptist Church	Harrison	TN
Bear Creek Baptist Church	Katy	TX
Bell Shoals Baptist Church	Brandon	FL

Bellevue Baptist Church	Cordova	TN
Bellevue Baptist Church	Owensboro	KY
Beltway Park Baptist Church	Abilene	TX
Berendo Street Baptist Church	Los Angeles	CA
Bethel Romanian Baptist Church	Asheville	NC
Bethels Family Baptist Church	Houston	TX
Bethlehem Church	Gastonia	NC
Biltmore Baptist Church	Arden	NC
Birchman Baptist Church	Fort Worth	TX
Blackshear Place Baptist Church	Flowery Branch	GA
Boiling Springs First Baptist Church	Boiling Springs	SC
Bon Air Baptist Church	Richmond	VA
Brainerd Baptist Church	Chattanooga	TN
Brand New Church	Bergman	AR
Brazos Fellowship	College Station	TX
Brentwood Baptist Church	Brentwood	TN
Brentwood Baptist Church	Houston	TX
Broadmoor Baptist Church	Madison	MS
Broadmoor Baptist Church	Shreveport	LA
Brookwood Church	Simpsonville	SC
Brushy Creek Baptist Church	Taylors	SC
Burning Bush Church	Victorville	CA
Burnt Hickory Baptist Church	Powder Springs	GA
Calvary Baptist Church	Alexandria	LA
Calvary Baptist Church	Beaumont	TX
Calvary Baptist Church	Clearwater	FL
Calvary Baptist Church	Tuscaloosa	AL
Calvary Baptist Church	Winston Salem	NC
Canaan Christian Church	Louisville	KY
Cape County Cowboy Church	Oak Ridge	MO
Carmel Baptist Church	Matthews	NC
Casas Church	Tucson	AZ
Cascade Hills Church	Columbus	GA
Cedar Creek Church	Aiken	SC
Cedar Street Baptist Church	Richmond	VA
Celebration Church	Metairie	LA
Center Point Church	North Richland Hills	TX
Central Baptist Bearden	Knoxville	TN
Central Baptist Church	College Station	TX
Central Baptist Church	Dunn	NC
Central Baptist Church	Hixson	TN
Central Baptist Church	Jonesboro	AR
Champion Forest Baptist Church	Houston	TX
Charis Church	Mentor	OH
Chets Creek Church	Jacksonville	FL
Christ Fellowship	Palmetto Bay	FL

Christ Journey Church	Coral Gables	FL
Church at the Springs	Ocala	FL
Church by the Glades	Coral Springs	FL
City Church	Tallahassee	FL
Clear Creek Community Church	League City	TX
Cleveland Community Church	Clayton	NC
Clovis Hills Community Church	Clovis	CA
Colonial Hills Church	Southaven	MS
Columbia Baptist Church	Falls Church	VA
Community Life Church	Forney	TX
Community Of Faith	Missouri City	TX
Concord Church	Dallas	TX
Cornerstone Baptist Church	Arlington	TX
Cornerstone Church	Ames	IA
Cornerstone Community Church	Orangeburg	SC
Cottonwood Creek Baptist Church	Allen	TX
Council Road Baptist Church	Bethany	OK
Cowboy Church of Ellis County	Waxahachie	TX
Crestview Baptist Church	Georgetown	TX
Cross Church	Springdale	AR
Cross Point Church	Duluth	GA
Crossgates Baptist Church	Brandon	MS
Crosspoint Church	Trussville	AL
Crosspoint City Church	Cartersville	GA
Crosspointe Church	Valdosta	GA
Crossroads Baptist Church	Newnan	GA
Crossroads Fellowship	Raleigh	NC
Crossway Baptist Church	Springfield	MO
Cuyahoga Valley Church	Broadview Heights	OH
Dallas Bay Baptist Church	Hixson	TN
Dallas Church of Light	Dallas	TX
Dawson Memorial Baptist Church	Birmingham	AL
Daybreak Church	Carlsbad	CA
Dayspring Baptist	Mobile	AL
Daystar Christian Fellowship	Greensboro	NC
Del Sol Church	El Paso	TX
Dogwood Church	Peachtree City	GA
Dothan Country Fellowship	Dothan	AL
Eagle's Landing First Baptist Church	McDonough	GA
East Bayou Baptist Church	Lafayette	LA
East Brent Baptist Church	Pensacola	FL
East Cooper Baptist Church	Mt. Pleasant	SC
East Memorial Baptist Church	Prattville	AL
Ecclesia Church	Houston	TX
Elevate Pastors Elevate Families	Grapevine	TX
Elevation Church	Matthews	NC

Elizabeth Baptist Church	Atlanta	GA
Emanuel Community Church	Conyers	GA
Emmanuel Baptist Church	Enid	OK
Christ Journey Church	Miami	FL
Englewood Baptist Church	Jackson	TN
Englewood Baptist Church	Rocky Mount	NC
Fairview Baptist Church	Columbus	MS
Fairview Baptist Church	Corryton	TN
Faith Baptist Church	Bartlett	TN
Faith Baptist Church	Youngsville	NC
Faith Promise Church	Knoxville	TN
Fallbrook Church	Houston	TX
Family Church	White Hall	AR
Fellowship at the Woodlands	The Woodlands	TX
Fellowship Community Church	Salem	VA
Fellowship of the Parks	Keller	TX
Fellowship of the Rockies	Pueblo	CO
Fielder Road Baptist Church	Arlington	TX
First Baptist Central Florida	Orlando	FL
First Baptist Church	Allen	TX
First Baptist Church	Amarillo	TX
First Baptist Church	Ardmore	OK
First Baptist Church	Arlington	TX
First Baptist Church	Arnold	MO
First Baptist Church	Atlanta	GA
First Baptist Church	Bentonville	AR
First Baptist Church	Bethlehem	GA
First Baptist Church	Brandon	FL
First Baptist Church	Branson	MO
First Baptist Church	Broken Arrow	OK
First Baptist Church	Burleson	TX
First Baptist Church	Carrollton	TX
First Baptist Church	Clarksville	TN
First Baptist Church	Cleveland	TN
First Baptist Church	Collierville	TN
First Baptist Church	Columbia	SC
First Baptist Church	Conyers	GA
First Baptist Church	Covington	LA
First Baptist Church	Dallas	TX
First Baptist Church	Denton	TX
First Baptist Church	Eules	TX
First Baptist Church	Forney	TX
First Baptist Church	Fort Lauderdale	FL
First Baptist Church	Fort Smith	AR
First Baptist Church	Frisco	TX
First Baptist Church	Gainesville	GA

First Baptist Church	Garland	TX
First Baptist Church	Hattiesburg	MS
First Baptist Church	Hendersonville	TN
First Baptist Church	Hendersonville	NC
First Baptist Church	Hurst	TX
First Baptist Church	Indian Trail	NC
First Baptist Church	Jackson	MS
First Baptist Church	Jacksonville	FL
First Baptist Church	Jacksonville	NC
First Baptist Church	Jonesboro	GA
First Baptist Church	Keller	TX
First Baptist Church	Kissimmee	FL
First Baptist Church	Lafayette	LA
First Baptist Church	Lakeland	FL
First Baptist Church	Lewisville	TX
First Baptist Church	Lubbock	TX
First Baptist Church	Maryville	IL
First Baptist Church	McKinney	TX
First Baptist Church	Merritt Island	FL
First Baptist Church	Middleburg	FL
First Baptist Church	Midland	TX
First Baptist Church	Midlothian	TX
First Baptist Church	Millington	TN
First Baptist Church	Montgomery	AL
First Baptist Church	Moore	OK
First Baptist Church	Morristown	TN
First Baptist Church	Naples	FL
First Baptist Church	Norfolk	VA
First Baptist Church	O'Fallon	IL
First Baptist Church	Odessa	TX
First Baptist Church	Opelika	AL
First Baptist Church	Orlando	FL
First Baptist Church	Oviedo	FL
First Baptist Church	Panama City	FL
First Baptist Church	Pasadena	TX
First Baptist Church	Plant City	FL
First Baptist Church	Powder Springs	GA
First Baptist Church	Powell	TN
First Baptist Church	Prattville	AL
First Baptist Church	Raytown	MO
First Baptist Church	Richmond	KY
First Baptist Church	Roanoke	VA
First Baptist Church	Rockwall	TX
First Baptist Church	Rogers	AR
First Baptist Church	Saint Charles	MO
First Baptist Church	San Antonio	TX

First Baptist Church	Sevierville	TN
First Baptist Church	Simpsonville	SC
First Baptist Church	Snellville	GA
First Baptist Church	Spartanburg	SC
First Baptist Church	Summit	MS
First Baptist Church	Tacoma	WA
First Baptist Church	Taylors	SC
First Baptist Church	Texarkana	TX
First Baptist Church	The Woodlands	TX
First Baptist Church	Thomasville	GA
First Baptist Church	Trussville	AL
First Baptist Church	Tulsa	OK
First Baptist Church	Tuscaloosa	AL
First Baptist Church	Universal City	TX
First Baptist Church	Vandalia	OH
First Baptist Church (Family Church)	West Palm Beach	FL
First Baptist Church	Wichita Falls	TX
First Baptist Church	Windermere	FL
First Baptist Church	Woodbridge	VA
First Baptist Church	Woodstock	GA
First Baptist Church	Woodway	TX
First Baptist Church	Wylie	TX
First Baptist Church Saint Louis	Arnold	MO
First Baptist Church of Mandarin	Jacksonville	FL
First Baptist North Mobile	Saraland	AL
First Baptist North Spartanburg	Spartanburg	SC
First Baptist of Indian Rocks	Largo	FL
First Bossier Baptist Church	Bossier City	LA
First Chinese Baptist Church	Los Angeles	CA
First Redeemer Church	Cumming	GA
First St. John Missionary Baptist	Fort Worth	TX
First West Fairbanks	West Monroe	LA
Fishhawk Fellowship Church	Lithia	FL
Five14 Church	New Albany	OH
Florence Baptist Church	Florence	KY
Foothills Community Church	Seneca	SC
Forest Park Baptist Church	Joplin	MO
Fountain of Praise	Houston	TX
Franklin Avenue Baptist Church	New Orleans	LA
Franklin Heights Baptist Church	Rocky Mount	VA
Freedom Church	Acworth	GA
French Speaking Baptist Church	Brooklyn	NY
Friendship West Baptist Church	Dallas	TX
Fruit Cove Baptist Church	Jacksonville	FL
Galilee Baptist Church	Suitland	MD
Gardendale First Baptist Church	Gardendale	AL

Genoa Baptist Church	Westerville	OH
Germantown Baptist Church	Germantown	TN
Geyer Springs First Baptist Church	Little Rock	AR
Glenhaven Baptist Church	McDonough	GA
Glenview Baptist Church	Fort Worth	TX
Global Mission Church	Silver Spring	MD
Golden Acres Baptist Church	Phenix City	AL
Good Hope Baptist Church	Houston	TX
Grace Baptist Church	Knoxville	TN
Grace Church	Des Moines	IA
Grace Church	Greenville	SC
Grace Community Church	Clarksville	TN
Grace Fellowship	West Palm Beach	FL
Grace Fellowship Church	Paradise	TX
Grace Point Church	San Antonio	TX
Graceland Baptist Church	New Albany	IN
Great Commission Baptist Church	Fort Worth	TX
Greater Exodus Baptist Church	Philadelphia	PA
Greater St. Matthew Baptist Church	Houston	TX
Green Acres Baptist Church	Tyler	TX
Green Valley Baptist Church	Henderson	NV
Greenforest Community Baptist Church	Decatur	GA
Grove Avenue Baptist Church	Richmond	VA
Grove Level Baptist Church	Maysville	GA
Hardin Baptist Church	Hardin	KY
Harris Creek Baptist Church	McGregor	TX
Harrisburg Baptist Church	Tupelo	MS
Harvest Church	Watauga	TX
Hawk Creek Baptist Church	London	KY
Hebron Baptist Church	Dacula	GA
Henderson Hills Baptist Church	Edmond	OK
Heritage Baptist Church	Texarkana	TX
Hibernia Baptist Church	Fleming Island	FL
Hickory Grove Baptist Church	Charlotte	NC
Higher Dimension Church	Houston	TX
Higher Ground Baptist Church	Kingsport	TN
Highlands Fellowship	Abingdon	VA
Highpoint Church	Memphis	TN
Highview Baptist Church	Louisville	KY
Hiland Park Baptist Church	Panama City	FL
Hillcrest Baptist Church	Anniston	AL
Hillcrest Baptist Church	Lebanon	TN
Hillcrest Church	Pensacola	FL
Hilldale Baptist Church	Clarksville	TN
Hillvue Heights Church	Bowling Green	KY
Hillwood Community Baptist Church	Fort Worth	TX

Hope Baptist Church	Las Vegas	NV
Hope Community Church	Raleigh	NC
Hopeful Baptist Church	Lake City	FL
Hopewell Baptist Church	Monroe	NC
Houston Northwest Church	Houston	TX
Houston's First Baptist Church	Houston	TX
Humble Area's First Baptist Church	Humble	TX
Hunter Street Baptist Church	Hoover	AL
Hunters Glen Baptist Church	Plano	TX
Hyde Park Baptist Church	Austin	TX
Hyland Heights Baptist Church	Rustburg	VA
Idlewild Baptist Church	Lutz	FL
Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville	Brownsville	TX
Immanuel Baptist Church	Highland	CA
Immanuel Baptist Church	Lebanon	TN
Immanuel Baptist Church	Lexington	KY
Immanuel Baptist Church	Little Rock	AR
Immanuel Baptist Church	Shawnee	OK
Immanuel Baptist Church	Tallahassee	FL
Ingleside Baptist Church	Macon	GA
Inland Hills Church	Chino	CA
Irvine Baptist Church	Irvine	CA
Istrouma Baptist Church	Baton Rouge	LA
Jacob's Well	Eau Claire	WI
Jersey Baptist Church	Pataskala	OH
Johns Creek Baptist Church	Alpharetta	GA
Johnson Ferry Baptist Church	Marietta	GA
Journey Church	Evans	GA
Journey Church	Raleigh	NC
Journey Church	Saint Louis	MO
Keystone Church	Keller	TX
Kingsland Baptist Church	Katy	TX
Kirby Woods Baptist Church	Memphis	TN
Koinonia Church	Arlington	TX
Lake Hills Church	Austin	TX
Lake Pointe Church	Rockwall	TX
Lakeside Baptist Church	Granbury	TX
Lakewood Baptist Church	Gainesville	GA
Lawndale Baptist Church	Greensboro	NC
Lee Park Church	Monroe	NC
Lenexa Baptist Church	Lenexa	KS
Lexington Baptist Church	Lexington	SC
Liberty Baptist Church	Hampton	VA
Life Community Church	Jamestown	NC
Lifepoint Church	Fredericksburg	VA
Lifepoint Church	Lewis Center	OH

Lifepoint Church	Smyrna	TN
Lifepoint Community Church	Tampa	FL
Lifespring Church	Bellevue	NE
Lindsay Lane Baptist Church	Athens	AL
Living Hope Baptist Church	Bowling Green	KY
Lone Oak First Baptist Church	Paducah	KY
Long Hollow Baptist Church	Hendersonville	TN
Longview Heights Baptist Church	Olive Branch	MS
Mandarin Baptist Church of Los Angeles	Alhambra	CA
Marathon Community Church	Greenville	SC
McGregor Baptist Church	Fort Myers	FL
Mecklenburg Community Church	Charlotte	NC
Mesilla Park Community Church	Mesilla Park	NM
Mesquite Friendship Baptist Church	Mesquite	TX
Metro Community Church	Edwardsville	IL
Metropolitan Baptist Church	Houston	TX
Ocean View Church	San Diego	CA
Midway Church	Villa Rica	GA
Mission Trails Church	La Mesa	CA
Mobberly Baptist Church	Longview	TX
Mosaic Baptist Church	Los Angeles	CA
Mount Ararat Church	Stafford	VA
Mountain Lake Church	Cumming	GA
Mt. Calvary Baptist Church	Fairfield	CA
Mt. Carmel Baptist Church	Charlotte	NC
Mt. Jezreel Baptist Church	Silver Spring	MD
Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church	Herndon	VA
Mt. Zion Baptist Church	Huntsville	AL
Mud Creek Baptist Church	Hendersonville	NC
Nations Ford Community Church	Charlotte	NC
New Faith Baptist Church	Matteson	IL
New Faith Church	Houston	TX
New Hope Baptist Church	Birmingham	AL
New Hope Baptist Church	Fayetteville	GA
New Hope Church	Lorton	VA
New Life Community Church	East Saint Louis	IL
New Mt. Calvary Baptist Church	Houston	TX
New River Community Church	Lake Wylie	SC
New Song Community Church	Oceanside	CA
New Spring Church	Anderson	SC
New Vision Baptist Church	Murfreesboro	TN
Newspring Church	Wichita	KS
North Asheville Baptist Church	Asheville	NC
North Jacksonville Baptist Church	Jacksonville	FL
North Metro First Baptist Church	Lawrenceville	GA
North Monroe Baptist Church	Monroe	LA

North Oxford Baptist Church	Oxford	MS
North Phoenix Baptist Church	Phoenix	AZ
North Richland Hills Baptist Church	North Richland Hills	TX
Northpark Baptist Church	Trussville	AL
Northpointe Community Church	Fresno	CA
Northside Baptist Church	Lexington	SC
Northside Baptist Church	Liverpool	NY
Northside Baptist Church	Weatherford	TX
Northstar Church	Kennesaw	GA
Northwood Church	Keller	TX
Oak Ridge Baptist Church	Salisbury	MD
Oakland Baptist Church	New Braunfels	TX
Oakwood Baptist Church	Chickamauga	GA
Oasis Church	Pembroke Pines	FL
Old Fort Baptist	Summerville	SC
Olive Baptist Church	Pensacola	FL
Paramount Baptist Church	Amarillo	TX
Park Cities Baptist Church	Dallas	TX
Parkway Baptist Church	Victoria	TX
Parkway Fellowship	Richmond	TX
Parkwood Baptist Church	Gastonia	NC
Pathways Community Church	Santee	CA
Paulann Baptist Church	San Angelo	TX
Peace Baptist Church	Decatur	GA
Peace Church	Wilson	NC
Pinelake Baptist Church	Brandon	MS
Pleasant Valley Baptist Church	Liberty	MO
Potential Church	Cooper City	FL
Powhatan Community Church	Powhatan	VA
Praise Temple Baptist Mission	Shreveport	LA
Prestonwood Baptist Church	Plano	TX
Glenview Baptist Church	Ponce	PR
Primera Iglesia Bautista of Red	Chattanooga	TN
Providence Baptist Church	Raleigh	NC
Quail Springs Baptist Church	Oklahoma City	OK
Redeemer Church	Lubbock	TX
Redeemer Fellowship	Kansas City	MO
Redemption City Church	Franklin	TN
Resurrection Baptist Church	Schertz	TX
Revolution Church	Canton	GA
Richland Creek Community Church	Wake Forest	NC
Ridgecrest Baptist Church	Dothan	AL
Ridgecrest Baptist Church	Springfield	MO
River Oak Church	Chesapeake	VA
River Pointe Church	Richmond	TX
Riverbend Church	Austin	TX

Riverland Hills Baptist Church	Irmo	SC
Rock Bridge Community Church	Dalton	GA
Rock Springs Baptist Church	Easley	SC
Rockpointe Church Flower	Mound	TX
Roswell Street Baptist Church	Marietta	GA
Russell Baptist Church	Green Cove Springs	FL
Russian Baptist Church	West Sacramento	CA
Saddleback Church	Lake Forest	CA
Sagebrush Community Church	Albuquerque	NM
Sagemont Church	Houston	TX
Saints' Rest Baptist Church	Oakland	CA
Sandals Church	Riverside	CA
Scotts Hill Baptist Church	Wilmington	NC
Second Baptist Church	Houston	TX
Second Baptist Church	Kingwood	TX
Second Baptist Church	Springfield	MO
Second Baptist Church	Warner Robins	GA
Severns Valley Baptist Church	Elizabethtown	KY
Sevier Heights Baptist Church	Knoxville	TN
Shades Mountain Baptist Church	Birmingham	AL
Shadow Hills Church	Las Vegas	NV
Shadow Mountain Community Church	El Cajon	CA
Shandon Baptist Church	Columbia	SC
Sharon Baptist Church	Philadelphia	PA
Shepherd of The Hills	Porter Ranch	CA
Sherwood Baptist Church	Albany	GA
Shiloh Metropolitan Baptist Church	Jacksonville	FL
Silverdale Baptist Church	Chattanooga	TN
Silverlake Church	Pearland	TX
Sixth Avenue Baptist Church	Birmingham	AL
Sixth Mt. Zion Baptist Temple	Hampton	VA
Skyland Baptist Church	Kannapolis	NC
Skyway Church	Goodyear	AZ
Sojourn Community Church	Louisville	KY
South Bay Church	San Jose	CA
South Biscayne Church	North Port	FL
South Tampa Baptist Church	Tampa	FL
Southcrest Baptist Church	Lubbock	TX
Southcrest Church	Newnan	GA
Southern Hills Church	Oklahoma City	OK
Southwest Community Baptist Church	Houston	TX
Southwinds Church	Tracy	CA
Spotswood Baptist Church	Fredericksburg	VA
Spring Baptist Church	Spring	TX
Spring Hills Community Church	Santa Rosa	CA
St. James Missionary Baptist Church	Austin	TX

St. Matthews Baptist Church	Williamstown	NJ
St. Paul Baptist Church	Charlotte	NC
St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church	Sacramento	CA
St. Paul's Baptist Church	Richmond	VA
St. Stephen Baptist Church	Louisville	KY
Stevens Street Baptist Church	Cookeville	TN
Stonebridge Church	The Woodlands	TX
Stonegates Fellowship	Midland	TX
Stuart Heights Baptist Church	Hixson	TN
Sugar Creek Baptist Church	Sugar Land	TX
Summer Grove Baptist Church	Shreveport	LA
Summit Church	Durham	NC
Summit Church	Estero	FL
Sunnyvale First Baptist Church	Sunnyvale	TX
Sunrise Church	Rialto	CA
Tallowood Baptist Church	Houston	TX
Temple Baptist Church	Hattiesburg	MS
Temple Baptist Church	New Bern	NC
Temple Missionary Baptist Church	San Bernardino	CA
The Austin Stone Community Church	Austin	TX
The Avenue Church	Waxahachie	TX
The Church at Battlecreek	Tulsa	OK
The Church at Brook Hills	Birmingham	AL
The Church at Rock Creek	Little Rock	AR
The Church of Rush Creek	Arlington	TX
The Cove Church	Mooresville	NC
The Crossing Church	Tampa	FL
The Fort Bend Church	Sugar Land	TX
The Glade Church	Mount Juliet	TN
The Grove Community Church	Riverside	CA
The Heights Baptist Church	Colonial Heights	VA
The Heights Baptist Church	Richardson	TX
The iChurch Movement	McAllen	TX
The People's Church	Franklin	TN
The Simple Church	Bossier City	LA
The Summit Church	Kernersville	NC
The Village Church	Flower Mound	TX
Thomas Road Baptist Church	Lynchburg	VA
Thompson Station Church	Thompson's Station	TN
Travis Avenue Baptist Church	Fort Worth	TX
Trinity Baptist Church	Lake Charles	LA
TrueNorth Church	North Augusta	SC
Twin Cities Church	Grass Valley	CA
Valley Baptist Church	Bakersfield	CA
Valley Creek Church	Flower Mound	TX
Valley View Church	Louisville	KY

Voices of Faith Ministries	Stone Mountain	GA
Walnut Ridge Baptist Church	Mansfield	TX
Warren Baptist Church	Augusta	GA
Waters Edge Church	Yorktown	VA
Watkinsville First Baptist Church	Watkinsville	GA
West University Baptist Church	Houston	TX
Westbrook Baptist Church	Hutchinson	KS
Westridge Church	Dallas	GA
Westside Baptist Church	Jacksonville	FL
Westside Church	Omaha	NE
Westwood Baptist Church	Alabaster	AL
Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church	Houston	TX
Whitesburg Baptist Church	Huntsville	AL
Willowbrook Baptist Church	Huntsville	AL
Woodcrest Chapel Baptist Church	Columbia	MO
Woodland Baptist Church	Bradenton	FL
Woodland Park Baptist Church	Chattanooga	TN
Word Tabernacle Church	Rocky Mount	NC

APPENDIX 4

DOCUMENTATION OF CORRESPONDENCE TO WORSHIP PASTORS INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WORSHIP DESIGN PROJECT 2014

Letter Announcing Survey

The following letter announcing the Worship Design Project 2014 was sent via United States Postal Service to the worship pastors of the churches listed in appendix 3:

Dear Worship Pastor,

Hello from Louisville, Kentucky! My name is Chuck Lewis. I serve as Assistant Professor of Church Music and Worship in the *Department of Biblical Worship* where we train the next generation of worship leaders at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Though I am a full-time professor, I am also a full-time PhD student in Christian Worship here at Southern Seminary with a dissertation on the horizon. A portion of my dissertation explores the goals, values and objectives that influence how worship leaders plan their worship services. Much of the dissertation is born out of my own experience as a worship pastor while serving for almost twenty years at FBC West Palm Beach and Celebration Baptist Church in Tallahassee.

Today, I am writing to ask for your help. Would you be a part of new and groundbreaking research in the area of worship service planning and design in SBC churches? In just a few days, I would like to invite you to participate in ***The Worship Design Project***. *The Worship Design Project* is a brief on-line survey developed to discover how ministers of music in the highest attended SBC churches in America (the top 500) design and sequence their services.

The survey should arrive in your email inbox on Thursday, May 29. As an incentive to participate, I will send you the results with analysis in about nine months. Please be assured that survey responses will **not** be connected with any specific church or any specific minister of music. Data will only be reported in aggregate. Also, as an additional incentive, three early responders will receive a \$100 Amazon gift card (more details will follow in the email).

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at ctlewis@sbts.edu. Also, you can authenticate my identity at <http://www.sbts.edu/bgs/faculty/lewis/>.

Many thanks for your consideration. I would greatly appreciate your participation. Your input could significantly impact future generations of worship leaders. Be on the lookout for the survey entitled ***The Worship Design Project*** in just a few days!

Sincerely in Christ,

Chuck Lewis
PhD Candidate in Christian Worship, *Department of Biblical Worship*
Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Email Linking to Survey

The following invitation email to participate in the Worship Design Project 2014 was sent to worship pastors of churches listed in appendix 3 whose email addresses were discoverable:

Dear Worship Pastor,

Hello again from Louisville, Kentucky, and Southern Seminary! I hope you are doing well. This email is a follow up to the letter I sent you a few days ago about *The Worship Design Project*.

Thank you for considering participating in *The Worship Design Project*, a research instrument developed to investigate how worship leaders in the highest attended SBC churches (the top 500) in the United States plan their worship services.

If you are ready to participate, please click here: **LINK TO SURVEY**

If you need a bit more information, please continue reading.

My name is Chuck Lewis. My background...I am one of you. I served FBC West Palm Beach and Celebration Baptist Church in Tallahassee for almost twenty years, much of that time as their senior worship pastor. Currently, I serve as Assistant Professor of Church Music and Worship in the *Department of Biblical Worship* where we train the next generation of worship leaders at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Though I am a full-time professor, I am also a full-time PhD student in Christian Worship here at Southern Seminary with a dissertation on the horizon. A portion of my dissertation explores the goals, values, and objectives that influence how worship leaders in the most attended SBC churches in America plan their worship services.

Today, I am asking for your help. Would you be part of new and groundbreaking research in the area of worship service planning and design? This email is to invite you to participate in a brief online **survey** developed specifically to discover how the ministers of music in the most attended SBC churches design and sequence their services. To begin the survey, please click **HERE**.

As an incentive to participate, I will share with you the results and analysis within about twelve months. Please be assured that survey responses will **NOT** be connected with any specific church or any specific minister of music. Data will only be reported in the aggregate. Also, as an additional incentive, three early responders will receive a \$100 Amazon gift card! Worship pastors responding by midnight tonight (Thursday, May 29)

will be eligible to win a drawing for a \$100 Amazon gift card. All those responding by midnight tomorrow night (Friday, May 30) will be eligible to win a second drawing for a \$100 Amazon gift card. Finally, all those responding by midnight on Monday, June 2, will be eligible to win a third drawing for a \$100 Amazon gift card.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at ctlewis@sbts.edu. Also, you can authenticate my identity at <http://www.sbts.edu/bgs/faculty/lewis/>.

Many thanks for your consideration. Your participation would be greatly appreciated. If I can ever serve you in any way, please feel free to contact me at any time.

May God bless and use the data collected to strengthen his church and to empower an ever-deepening expression of worship by his people. Click here to begin ***The Worship Design Project survey***.

In Him,

Chuck Lewis
PhD Candidate in Christian Worship, *Department of Biblical Worship*
Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

First Email Reminder

The following reminder email to participate in the Worship Design Project 2014 was sent to worship pastors of churches listed in appendix 3 who had not yet participated in the survey within approximately seven days of the initial invitation.

Dear Worship Pastor,

Hello again from Louisville, Kentucky, and Southern Seminary! I hope you are doing well and enjoying the summer months of ministry. This message is a follow-up to an email that I sent you several days ago about *The Worship Design Project*.

I am writing to ask for your help. Would you consider participating in this groundbreaking research in the area of worship service planning? I am conducting a study of the top 500 highest attended Southern Baptist churches in the United States to discover how their ministers of music design and sequence their services. Your input is vitally important and would be greatly appreciated.

If you are ready to participate, please click here: **LINK TO SURVEY**

If you need a bit more information, please continue reading.

My name is Chuck Lewis. My background...I am one of you. I served FBC West Palm Beach and Celebration Baptist Church in Tallahassee for almost twenty years, much of that time as their senior worship pastor. Currently, I serve as Assistant Professor of Church Music and Worship in the *Department of Biblical Worship* where we train the next generation of worship leaders at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Though I am a full-time professor, I am also a full-time PhD student in Christian Worship here at Southern Seminary with a dissertation on the horizon. A portion of my dissertation explores the goals, values and objectives that influence how worship leaders plan their worship services. To begin the survey, please click **HERE**.

As an incentive to participate, I will share with you the results and analysis within about twelve months. Please be assured that survey responses will **NOT** be connected with any specific church or any specific minister of music. Data will only be reported in the aggregate.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at ctlewis@sbts.edu. Also, you can authenticate my identity at <http://www.sbts.edu/bgs/faculty/lewis/>.

Many thanks for your consideration. Your participation would be greatly appreciated. If I can ever serve you in any way, please feel free to contact me at any time.

May God bless and use the data collected to strengthen his church and to empower an ever-deepening expression of worship by his people. Click here to begin ***The Worship Design Project survey.***

In Him,

Chuck Lewis
PhD Candidate in Christian Worship, *Department of Biblical Worship*
Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Second Email Reminder

The following reminder email to participate in the Worship Design Project 2014 was sent to worship pastors of churches listed in appendix 3 who had not yet participated in the survey within approximately fourteen days of the initial invitation.

Dear Worship Pastor,

Good morning. I hope you are having a great summer! This email is a follow up to the letter I sent you a few weeks ago about *The Worship Design Project*.

Time is ticking down to be a part of *The Worship Design Project* research. The portal will be closing in just a few days! I'm hoping that you will consider participating. *The Worship Design Project* is a research instrument developed to investigate how worship leaders in the highest attended Southern Baptist churches (the top 500) in the United States plan their worship services.

If you are ready to participate, please click here: **LINK TO SURVEY**

If you need a bit more information, please continue reading.

My name is Chuck Lewis. My background...I am one of you. I served FBC West Palm Beach and Celebration Baptist Church in Tallahassee for almost twenty years, much of that time as their senior worship pastor. Currently, I serve as Assistant Professor of Church Music and Worship in the *Department of Biblical Worship* where we train the next generation of worship leaders at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Though I am a full-time professor, I am also a full-time PhD student in Christian Worship here at Southern Seminary with a dissertation on the horizon. A portion of my dissertation explores the goals, values and objectives that influence how worship leaders in the most attended SBC churches in America plan their worship services.

Today, I am asking for your help. Would you contribute to this new and groundbreaking research in the area of worship service planning and design? This email is to invite you to participate in a brief online **survey** developed specifically to discover how the ministers of music in the most attended SBC churches design and sequence their services. To begin the survey, please click **HERE**.

As an incentive to participate, I will share with you the results and analysis within about twelve months. Please be assured that survey responses will **NOT** be connected with any specific church or any specific minister of music. Data will only be reported in the aggregate. Also, as an additional incentive, two early responders will receive a \$50 Amazon gift card! Worship pastors responding by midnight tonight (Thursday, June 19)

will be eligible to win a drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift card. All those responding by midnight on Monday, June 23, will be eligible to win a second drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift card.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at ctlewis@sbts.edu. Also, you can authenticate my identity at <http://www.sbts.edu/bgs/faculty/lewis/>.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated. Time is of the essence. The survey portal will close permanently on June 30, 2014 at midnight.

Many thanks for your consideration. If I can ever serve you in any way, please feel free to contact me at any time.

May God bless and use the data collected to strengthen his church and to empower an ever-deepening expression of worship by his people. Click here to begin ***The Worship Design Project survey***.

In Him,

Chuck Lewis
PhD Candidate in Christian Worship, *Department of Biblical Worship*
Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Letter of Invitation to Access the Survey

The following invitation to participate in the Worship Design Project 2014 was sent via the United States Postal Service to worship pastors of churches listed in appendix 3 whose email addresses were undiscoverable:

Dear Worship Pastor,

Hello again from Louisville, Kentucky, and Southern Seminary! I hope you are doing well. This letter is a follow up to the letter I sent you a few days ago about *The Worship Design Project*.

Thank you for considering participating in *The Worship Design Project*, a research instrument developed to investigate how worship leaders in the highest attended SBC churches (the top 500) in the United States plan their worship services.

I have been unable to reach you by email, but as a part of the SBC top 500, I wanted to reach out to you via snail mail and ask you be a part of new and groundbreaking research in the area of worship service planning and design.

You can access the survey by typing the following URL into your web browser:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/The_Worship_Design_Project_2014

Or, if you like, please email me at ctlewis@sbts.edu, and I will send you an email invitation with the appropriate link to follow.

Many thanks for your consideration. Your input is important, and I would be grateful if you would be a part of this research. If I can ever serve you in any way, please feel free to contact me at any time.

May God bless and use the data collected to strengthen his church and to empower an ever-deepening expression of worship by his people.

In Him,

Chuck Lewis
PhD Candidate in Christian Worship, *Department of Biblical Worship*
Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Email Thanking Participants

The following thank you email was sent to all participants in the Worship Design Project 2014. This email also invited worship pastors to submit a representative order of service to be included in this dissertation (see appendix 5).

Dear Worship Pastor,

Hello from Louisville, KY. I hope you have had a great summer. It's hard to believe that it's time to kick off the Fall 2014 ministry season.

I am writing to thank you for participating in *The Worship Design Project 2014* launched in May/June. Over 250 worship pastors and ministers of music responded! I am so thankful to you and all who participated.

I have one additional request. As we continue to research worship practices in Southern Baptist churches, I have discovered that historic records of Baptist worship services as a whole do not exist (apart from the periodic publications of the Baptist hymnal). In my dissertation research, I would like to include a snapshot of actual orders of service representing our top 500 SBC churches. This will be the first of its kind. Would you be willing to submit an order of service to be included as a part of a 2014 historical record of SBC worship services? If so, would you forward this email to your ministry assistant or secretary and ask him/her to complete this form? **Order of Service LINK**

Entering the service information should only take about 5 minutes. Please select any worship service from 2014 that you would consider normal or typical (i.e., not seasonal or special emphasis). If you have multiple services, please select a service that would be led at your most attended worship service on your main campus. Submission of a worship service order will be indicative of your permission to include your service and you as the worship leader in *the Historical Documentation* portion of my research. I will also include all of the services submitted in my report that I send to you in about nine months.

Again, many thanks to you for your participation. If I or any of our Department of Biblical Worship leadership team here at Southern Seminary can ever serve you or encourage you in any way, feel free to call on us at any time. Please know that you and your ministry are in our thoughts and prayers.

If you would like to know a little more about the vision and opportunities offered in our worship leader training degrees at Southern Seminary, please check out this video **DBW VIDEO LINK** or head to our website at **Department of Biblical Worship**.

At the end of this email, I am including the collective responses to Question 28 of *The Worship Design Project* survey which said: "In the past year, what are three new songs

that you have introduced to your church that have been well-received?” Please scroll down to see the results. On a personal note, two new worship songs that I think are especially strong are “Lord, I Need You” and “Come, Behold the Wondrous Mystery.” Again, thanks so much! Have a great kick-off to your fall ministries! May God richly bless you, your family, and your ministry.

In Him,

Chuck Lewis
PhD Candidate in Christian Worship, *Department of Biblical Worship*
Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

APPENDIX 5

REPRESENTATIVE WORSHIP SERVICES SUBMITTED BY WORSHIP PASTORS PARTICIPATING IN THE WORSHIP DESIGN PROJECT 2014

Worship pastors who participated in the Worship Design Project 2014 were asked to submit an order of service for the purpose of historically documenting representative samples of worship services occurring in Southern Baptist churches across the United States. The following directions were indicated to the participating worship pastors:

Please select any worship service from 2014 that you would consider normal or typical (i.e., not seasonal or special emphasis). If you have multiple services, please select a service that would be led at your most attended worship service on your main campus.

Fifty-one worship pastors submitted orders of service to be included in this dissertation. Their respective orders of service appear on the following pages. The participating churches are in alphabetical order. Names of worship pastors are included by permission.

Apex Community Church

Dayton, OH

May 31, 2014

11:00 a.m.

Phil Wing, Gathering Team Lead

Pre-Gathering Video – Countdown Clock, Background Musical Playlist Playing,
Pre-Service Announcement Slides Scrolling on Screen

Welcome and Introduction to Gathering – Band Leader

Responsive Reading of Psalm 62 – Band Leader

Congregational Singing – “Fix My Eyes” (King’s Kaleidoscope)

Congregational Singing – “Nothing but the Blood” (Citizens)

Sermon – Preaching through Psalm 54 (Preaching Pastor)

Congregational Singing – “Oceans” (Hillsong)

Congregational Singing – “Jesus I My Cross Have Taken” (Apex)

Baptism with Video Testimony

Congregational Singing – “Made Alive” (Citizens)

Wrap Up – Preaching Pastor

Dispatch Prayer – A Time of Prayer over Missionaries Being Sent out to Mexico

Dismissal

Bellevue Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY
February 9, 2014
9:15 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.

J.P. Kwok, Worship Pastor

Walk-In Countdown

Song – “Alive Forever Amen” (with Orchestra and Choir)

Welcome

Baptism

Song – “I Will Follow” (with Orchestra and Choir)

Scripture

Song – “Mighty to Save” (with Orchestra and Choir)

Song – “Lord I Run to You” (with Orchestra and Choir)

Prayer

Offering

Message

Invitation – “Mighty to Save”

Announcements

Decisions

Blackshear Place Baptist Church
Flowery Branch, GA
August 17, 2014
8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m., and 11:00 a.m.

Rob Britton, Worship Pastor

Pre-Service Music

Baptism

Call to Worship – “The Name of the Lord Is Great”
(BPBC Worship Choir and Orchestra)

Praise and Worship – “Blessed Be the Name”

Welcome of Guests – Rob Britton, Worship Pastor

Praise and Worship – “There’s Something about That Name”

Praise and Worship – “Praise the Name of Jesus”

Praise and Worship – “Your Name”

Pastor’s Moment – Jeff Crook, Senior Pastor

Offertory Prayer and Worship through Giving

Special Music – “Not Guilty” (BPBC Worship Choir and Orchestra)

Message – Jeff Crook, Senior Pastor

Invitation

Invitation Song – “Have Thine Own Way”

Focus on the Week

Postlude

Central Baptist Church
Jonesboro, AR
August 17, 2014
9:30 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.

Jeff Stotts, Lead Worship Pastor

10-Minute Pre-Service Announcement Video

Opening Worship Song – “God Is Able” (Hillsong, Fielding, Morgan)

Welcome and Top Priority Announcements

Baptism Videos and Baptisms

Worship Song – “Jesus Son of God” (Tomlin, Maher)

Worship Song – “Here’s My Heart” (Crowder, Giglio, Ingram, and Tomlin)

Message Series Bumper Video

Message – Pastor

Commitment Song – “Here’s My Heart”

Prayer of Commitment and Offering

Offering and Promotional Video – “What’s Next”

Closing – Reminders, Departing Missions Teams Commissioning and Prayer

Dismiss

Post-Service Music (recorded, upbeat)

Columbia Baptist Church
Falls Church, VA
July 13, 2014
11:15 a.m.

Jim Watson, Pastor for Worship, Music and Arts

Orchestra Prelude – “Bless the Lord,” (arr. Cranfill)

Call to Worship – Jim Watson

Hymn – “Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine”

Choral Worship – “We the Church” with Choir and Orchestra (arr. Williamson)

Testimony – Church Member

Hymn – “Oh, How I Love Jesus”

Offertory Prayer – Choir Member

Piano Offertory – “Balm in Gilead” (arr. J. Martin)

Worship in Song – “His Strength Is Perfect”

Sermon – Dr. Jim Baucom, Senior Pastor

Invitation Hymn – “I Love to Tell the Story”

Introduction of Decisions – Pastor

Closing Chorus – “Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine”

Organ Postlude

Cottonwood Creek Church
Allen, TX
July 27, 2014
9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

Keith Tyler, Worship and Arts Ministry

Video Countdown

Opening Video Trailer – “God’s Not Dead”

Congregational Singing – “Because He Lives” (G3)

Congregational Singing – “Whom Shall I Fear” (Chris Tomlin)

Congregational Singing – “Victorious” (Gateway Church)

Welcome Time

Meet and Greet

Offering Prayer

Offering Song – “Break Every Chain”

Baptism

Congregational Singing – “Break Every Chain” (chorus only)

Message – Pastor

Altar Time

Leave to Music

Crestview Baptist Church
Georgetown, TX
August 10, 2014
8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

Philip May, Minister of Music

Band Prelude – “Lead Me to the Cross”

Welcome

Call to Worship – “Again and Again” (Choir and Congregation)

Invocation

Hymn – “Jesus Is All the World to Me”

Song – “How Can I Keep from Singing”

Song – “I Sing Praises”

Choir Anthem – “Dig a Little Deeper”

Children’s Sermon

Message

Hymn of Commitment – “Take My Life and Let it Be”

Offertory Hymn – “He Leadeth Me”

Recognition of New Members

Benediction – “Soon and Very Soon”

Eagle's Landing First Baptist Church
McDonough, GA
August 3, 2014
11:00 a.m.

Billy Lord, Worship Pastor

Pre-Service Music (cityscape shown on side wall)

Video Countdown

Opening Song – “Rain Down” (Mark Hall, Clayton McClure, Melodee DeVevo)

Welcome/Greeting – Billy Lord

Worship Song – “I’m Going Free (Jailbreak)” (Billy Lord)

Worship Song – “Christ Is Enough” (Clayton McClure)

Baptisms – Adam Pollack, Mark Hall

Prayer – Clayton McClure

Worship Song – “It Is Well” (Melodee DeVevo)

Worship Song – “Lord, I Need You” (Mark Hall)

Transition Prayer – Tim Dowdy, Pastor

Message – “The Gospel in Life, in God’s Way,” Tim Dowdy, Pastor

Invitation Prayer – Tim Dowdy, Pastor

Invitation Song – “My Jesus I Love Thee” (Matt Duren)

Closing Announcements – Tim Dowdy, Pastor

Fellowship Community Church
Salem, VA
August 17, 2014
8:15 a.m., 9:45 a.m., and 11:15 a.m.

Rick Jacobs, Worship Pastor

Video Announcements with Video Skit (promoting upcoming event)

Congregational Song – “Only King Forever” (Elevation Worship)

Solo – “God’s Will” (Martina McBride)

Video Testimony – “In His Image” (Disabilities’ Ministry)

Welcome – Elisha Kirby (IHI Director)

Meet and Greet

Congregational Singing – “Great Are You, Lord” (All Sons and Daughters)

Congregational Singing – “Nothing Is Wasted” (Elevation Worship)

Sermon Bumper

Sermon

Closing Prayer

Fielder Church
Arlington, TX
August 10, 2014
11:00 a.m.

Jim Parks, Weekend Pastor

Band Prelude – “Gotta Serve Somebody”

3 Baptisms with Video Testimonies

Welcome – Dr. Gary Smith

Congregational Singing – “Whom Shall I Fear”

Congregational Singing – “Who Is like Our God”

Scripture Reading and Teaching Chorus of New Song – Chris Clayton

Congregational Singing – “The Greatness of Our God”

Congregational Singing – “Great Are You Lord”

Video (sermon introduction)

Sermon – Jason Paredes

Song of Response – “Great Are You Lord”

Offertory Prayer – Jason Paredes

Story Video (Tacoma mission effort)

Video Announcement (back-to-school bash)

Prayer of Blessing and Sending Out – C.J. Mallott

Band Payout – “Great Are You Lord”

First Baptist Church
Dallas, TX
July 27, 2014
9:15 a.m. & 10:50 a.m.

Doran Bugg, Minister of Music & Worship

Orchestra Prelude – “Come, Christians, Join to Sing”

Opening Video Bumper (1 minute)

Congregational Singing – “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”

Fellowship Time

Congregational Singing – “Here for You”

Congregational Singing – “Holy Ground” (chorus excerpts only)

Prayer – Dr. Doran Bugg, Minister of Music and Worship

Baptisms

Welcome to Worship/Announcements – Dr. Doran Bugg

Congregational Scripture Reading – Rev. Ron Harris

Offertory Prayer – Rev. Ron Harris

Choir and Orchestra Anthem – “Faithful to the End”

Sermon – Dr. Robert Jeffress

Invitation – “Take My Life and Let It Be”

Invitation – “Just as I Am”

Invitation – “Above All”

Pastor’s Closing Comments

Announcements – Walter Guillaume, Executive Pastor

Parting Chorus – “Praise His Holy Name”

First Baptist Church
Hendersonville, NC
August 24, 2014
9:45 a.m.

Stephen Cutchins, Associate Pastor of Worship

Pre-Service Music – CD

5-Minute Countdown (with music)

Worship Song – “One Things Remains”

Video – “Clean Slate”

Worship Song – “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)”

Announcements and Welcome

Worship Song – “Revelation Song”

Worship Song – “Oceans (Where Feet May Fall)”

Offering – Prayer and Solo

Sermon – Included Video Testimony and Challenge

Response Time – “Oceans” (reprise)

Closing Prayer

First Baptist Church
Lubbock, TX
[Date Not Submitted]
11:00 a.m.

Kenyon Draughon, Associate Pastor of Music and Worship

Welcome Video (from WorshipHouse Media)

Grip-n-Grin (greet others worshipping near you)

Congregational Singing – “Christ Is Risen” (Matt Maher)

Congregational Singing – “How Great Is Our God” (Tomlin)

Congregational Singing – “How Great Thou Art” (2 choruses only)

Congregational Singing – “Jesus Son of God” (Tomlin) (with prayer to close)

Theme Interpretation – What’s in a Name

Original Video of “Names” (included “My Everything” – Kari Jobe)

Message – The Question of Life After Death (John 11)

Song of Response – “How Great Is Our God”

Offering Prayer

Offering – “How Does Your Giving Make a Difference?” (original video)

Brief Announcement

Outro – “How Great Is Our God” (Band playing)

First Baptist Church
Panama City, FL
April, 2014
7:45 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.

Ken Brookins, Associate Pastor, Music

Prelude of Praise (Organist)

Instrumental – “Matchless King” (Orchestra)

Choir/Orchestra Special – “Jesus Is Alive!”

Sharing New Life in Christ through Baptism

Welcome to Everyone, Especially Guests

Congregational Singing – “All Hail the Power / Crown Him with Many Crowns”
(medley)

Congregational Singing – “Revelation Song”

Choir/Orchestra Special – “Victor’s Crown”

Young Adult Choir / Band – “Victorious God”

Congregational Singing – “Great I Am” (The Mountains Shake)

Pastor’s Offertory Prayer

Offering

Choir/Orchestra Special – “He Lives” (Houghton)

Message – Pastor

Invitation and Response – “Call upon the Name of the Lord”

Presenting Those Making Decisions

Declaration of Praise – “Jesus is Alive” (Choir and Orchestra)

“Outroit” (Organist)

First Baptist Church
Snellville, GA
July 10, 2014
9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

Wayne Grothman, Executive Pastor and Worship and Arts Pastor

Video Countdown (pre-service)

Video Announcements

Congregational Singing – “Declare Your Name”

Welcome Guests – Dr. Wayne Grothman

Congregational Singing – “Sing to the King”

Congregational Singing – “Great I Am”

Congregational Singing – “Draw Me Close”

Offertory Prayer – Dr. Wayne Grothman

Adult Choir Special, with Solo – “I Choose to Worship”

Message – Steve Foster, Pastor

Invitation Song – “Draw Me Close”

Closing Thoughts and Prayer – Dr. Wayne Grothman

First Baptist Church

Trussville, AL

June 29, 2014

9:15 a.m.

Joe Estes, Minister of Music and Worship

Pre-Service Music – Gayle Glenn, Organist

Video

Congregational Singing – “We’ve a Story to Tell”

Congregational Singing – “I Love to Tell the Story”

Prayer – Dr. Blake Kersey, Children’s Minister

Welcome – Buddy Champion, Pastor

Meet-n-Greet/Fellowship Song – “Rise up, O Church of God”

Feature Song – “Jesus Saves” (Choir and Orchestra)

Sermon Introduction Video – “Evidence”

Message – “What Do I Do with the Evidence about Jesus?” – Buddy Champion,
Pastor

Our Response – “So Send I You”

Offertory Prayer – Jim Summers, Deacon

Offertory – “People Need the Lord” (Orchestra)

Introductions – Chris Chambers, Missions/Pastoral Care Minister;
Bobby Erwin, Senior Adults Minister; and Buddy Champion, Pastor

Closing Song – “Take My Life, Lead Me Lord”

Exit Music (MOR worship CD)

First Baptist Church
Universal City, TX
August 3, 2014
10:30 a.m.

Charles Colvin, Minister of Worship

Pre-Service Music – Tech Crew (CD music of future songs of the month)

From the Pastor’s Heart – David Lindow, Pastor (announcements)

Congregational Singing – “Rising”

Congregational Singing – “Blessed Assurance (My King Is Coming)”

Choir Special – “I’m Amazed” (Choir with Orchestra)

Congregational Singing – “Amazed”

Congregational Singing – “In the Presence of Jehovah”

Offertory Prayer – David Lindow, Pastor

Offertory – “The Love of God / Jesus Loves Me” (instrumental by the Orchestra)

Message – David Lindow, Pastor

Invitation – “Have Thine Own Way, Lord”

First Baptist Church
Vandalia, OH
November 9, 2014
8:20 a.m. and 9:45 a.m.

Randy Pope, Worship Pastor

1-Minute Video of Recent Church Ministry Activities

Welcome

Baptism Video

Congregational Song – “Great Is the Lord”

Congregational Song – “Open up the Heavens”

Congregational Song – “He Knows My Name”

Adult Choir and Orchestra – “Something Happens”

Offertory Prayer

Offering (ministry highlight video shown during offering)

Sermon Message

Invitation – Pianist Plays during Invitation

Closing Remarks – Pastor Makes a Few Announcements

First Baptist Church (Family Church)

West Palm Beach, FL

October 5, 2014

9:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.

Christian Ramos, Worship Pastor

“We Praise Your Name” (arr. Mark T. Bovee) – Family Church Worship Choir and Orchestra with Ariel Hermoso

Pastoral Welcome – Dr. Jimmy Scroggins

Baptism – Mason T.

Congregational Worship – “This I Believe”

Congregational Worship – “How Great Thou Art”

Congregational Worship – “Great I Am”

Prayer

Offering and Announcements

Series Intro Video – “Proverbs: Blueprint for Character”

Message – Dr. Jimmy Scroggins

Next Steps – Steve Wright

iPod Outro

FishHawk Fellowship

Lithia, FL

July 27, 2014

9:30 a.m.

Mathew Leach, Pastor of Worship

Announcement Slides

Welcome – David Whitten, Senior Pastor

Congregational Worship – “Open up Our Eyes”

Congregational Worship – “Found in You”

Baptism – Tony Parker, Pastor of Family Ministries

Welcome/Greeting Time – Mathew Leach, Pastor

Congregational Worship – “Great I Am”

Congregational Worship – “Forever Reign”

Message – David Whitten, Pastor

Invitation

Offering and Announcements – David Whitten, Pastor

Florence Baptist Church at Mt. Zion

Florence, KY
August 10, 2014
10:30 a.m.

Philip Hearn, Worship Pastor

Pre-Service music (CD)

Welcome and Greeting – Worship Pastor

Worship Song – “Blessed Assurance” (with Band)

Worship Song – “Thrive” (with Band)

Time of Fellowship

Baptisms (1 by Lead Pastor, 2 by Teaching Pastor)

Choir Special – “Defender” (accompanied by Band)

Worship Song – “For My Good” (with Band)

Video – “Greater” (for the sermon series)

Illustration to Set up Message – Corey Abney, Lead Pastor

Message – Lead Pastor

Invitation – “It Is Well with My Soul” (with band)

Pastoral Ministry and Prayer (announce fall kick-off and new Elementary Director)

Offering/Worship – “Overcome” (with Band)

Post-Service Music (CD)

Gardendale First Baptist Church

Gardendale, AL

June 22, 2014

9:15 a.m.

Roy McNiel, Worship Pastor

Opening Song – “So Good” (Lincoln Brewster)

2nd Opening Song – “Everywhere That I Go” (Lakewood)

Welcome/Prayer – Kevin Hamm, Pastor

Worship – “Victory in Jesus” (Travis Cottrell version)

Worship – “Unto God” (Planetshakers)

Worship – “O for a Thousand (Hallelujah)” (Gateway Worship)

Offering Prayer – Roy McNiel

Adult Choir Special – “No More Night” (Prestonwood Baptist)

Message – Kevin Hamm, Pastor

Video – “Hope Is Here”

Lord’s Supper – Pastor and Deacons

Invitation – “There Is a Fountain” (Celebration Hymnal)

Grace Church
Des Moines, IA
[Date Not Submitted]

Marty Kelly, Pastor of Worship Ministries

Pre-Service Celebration – CD Praise & Worship

Countdown Video – “Won’t Start Now” (with Band)

Call to Praise – “Won’t Start Now” (Band and Vocal Team)

Welcome/Congregational Greeting – Marty Kelly, Worship Pastor

Worship and Celebration – Marty Kelly and Worship Team

Worship and Celebration – “Only a God like You”

Worship and Celebration – “The Same Love”

Scripture Reading – Psalm 139:23-24

“What the Lord Has Done in Me”

Offertory Prayer – Marty Kelly, Pastor

Offertory Worship Song – Instrumental

Pastor’s Message/Invitation – Phil Winfield, Pastor

“The Outward Show Is All They Know” (Luke 11:37-54)

Service Exit Music – CD Praise and Worship

Grace Fellowship
West Palm Beach, FL
June 1, 2014
11:15 a.m.

Shawn Allen, Worship Pastor

Congregational Singing – “He Was There”

Congregational Scripture Reading – Psalm 66:1-4

Congregational Singing – “Glorious”

Announcements

Offering

Prayer

Offering Song and Congregational Singing – “Great I Am”

Congregational Singing – “Break Every Chain”

Message

Congregational Singing – “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love”

Benediction

Hibernia Baptist Church
Fleming Island, FL
June 1, 2014
10:45 a.m.

Archie Jackson, Minister of Music

Call to Praise – “Worship the Great I Am”

Welcome/Prayer – Archie Jackson

Music for Welcome – “The Name of Jesus”

Baptism

Testimony – Gage Bennett

Senior Recognition – Jonathan Reavis, Pastor

Prayer for Offering – Scott Yirka, Pastor

Offertory Music – “Glorious Day”

Praise and Worship – “Cornerstone”

Message – Scott Yirka, Pastor

Invitation – “Come unto Jesus”

Video – IHAH

Closing – “The Name of Jesus”

Highview Baptist Church

Louisville, KY

August 24, 2014

9:00 a.m.

Lange Patrick, Worship Pastor

Call to Worship – “Every Praise”

Scripture Reading

Congregational Singing – “Victory in Jesus”

Congregational Singing – “To God Be the Glory”

Commissioning Time (Pastor going on mission trip)

Offering – “Redeemed”

Sermon – Les Hughes, Pastor

Song of Response – “Wherever He Leads I’ll Go”

Benediction

Hilddale Baptist Church
Clarksville, TN
January 26, 2014
8:30 a.m.

Lyndel Littleton, Worship Pastor

Welcome – Senior Pastor

Pastoral Prayer – Senior Pastor

Congregational Singing – “Glorious Is Thy Name”

Congregational Singing – “Glorious Mighty God”

Congregational Singing – “Everlasting God”

Choir Anthem – “Blood of Jesus Be My All”

Fellowship (Shaking Hands) Song – “You Are Holy (Prince of Peace)”

Congregational Singing – “Are You Washed in the Blood”

Congregational Singing – “Covers Me for Life”

Special Music – “I Surrender All” (solo)

Message – Senior Pastor

Invitation Song – “I Give You Me”

Offertory – Piano

Recognition of Decisions Made and Closing Announcements

Humble Area's First Baptist Church

Humble, TX

August 10, 2014

9:30 a.m.

Mark Harden, Worship Pastor

Opening Congregational Song / Choir Anthem - "Victorious God"

Baptism – Steve Self, Middle School Pastor

Welcome – Barry Jeffries, Pastor

Congregational Song – "Salvation Is Here"

Congregational Song – "Savior"

Scripture Reading (Rev 4:4-8) – Mark Harden, Music and Worship Pastor

Congregational Song – "Revelation Song"

Offering Prayer – Mark Harden, Music and Worship Pastor

Congregational Song – "Jesus Messiah"

Prayer – Barry Jeffries, Pastor

Focal Scripture – Barry Jeffries, Pastor

Message – Barry Jeffries, Pastor

Invitation – Barry Jeffries and Other Pastors Down Front

Invitation Song – "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

Closing Prayer – Barry Jeffries, Pastor

Post-Service Song – "Salvation Is Here"

Idlewild Baptist Church

Lutz, FL

August 10, 2014

9:15 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.

Ron Upton, Lead Minister, Music and Worship

Video – “In the Know”

Baptism

Congregational Song – “Only King Forever”

Scripture Reading

Congregational Song – “I Have a Hope”

Worship Choir and Orchestra Special – “But God”

Welcome (shake hands, welcome one another)

Awana Segment

Pastor Narrative

Offertory – “Tis so Sweet to Trust in Jesus”

Study in the Word (Pastor’s sermon)

Invitation – “Just As I Am” (Travis Cottrell)

Lenexa Baptist Church

Lenexa, KS

August 10, 2014

9:30 a.m.

Bill Shiflett, Worship Pastor

Video Prelude

Video Countdown

Opening Congregational Song – “Arise” (with full Band, Choir, and Praise Team)

Baptism and Prayer

Brief Welcome

Singing Together – “Lead Me to the Cross” (all)

Communion (graphics and various instrumentals)

Special – “Fountain of Life” (featuring Choir/Orchestra and soloist)

Singing Together – “O the Blood” (all)

Message (emphasis on baptism)

Invitation – “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)”

Prayer

Offertory – “Always” (trio and combo)

Brief Announcements

Recognition of Decisions

Closing Prayer

Liberty Baptist Church

Hampton, VA

May 4, 2014

9:15 a.m.

Jeff Askew, Senior Associate Pastor, Worship

Announcement Video

Live Welcome to Worship – Stuart Smithson, Pastor

Congregational Song – “Open up the Heavens”

Congregational Song – “God Is Able”

Worship Choir Special Song – “Mercy Tree”

Begin Streaming Feed to Multi-Site

Bumper Video

Sermon – Grant Ethridge, Pastor

Sermon Prayer 1 – Grant Ethridge

Sermon Prayer 2 – Grant Ethridge

End Multi-Site Feed

Invitation Song – “Lord I Need You”

(Band and Praise Team only, Grant Ethridge leads invitation)

Offertory Prayer – Grant Ethridge, Pastor

Offering Song – “Forever” (1st half, Band and Praise Team only)

Baptisms (3) – Joe Hunt, Pastor

Offering Song – “Forever” (2nd Half, Band and Praise Team only)

Introduction of New Members/Decisions for Christ – Grant Ethridge, Pastor

Final Announcements and Dismissal – Scott Payne, Pastor

Life Community Church
Jamestown, NC
October 19, 2014
9:00 a.m.

Greg Ottaway, Worship Leader

Service Starter Video – “I Am Here to Worship”

Welcome and Invitation to Worship

Congregational Song – “Everyday I Live”

Congregational Song – “Glorious One”

Life Moment Video – “What Happened to the 59 Signers?”

Pastor Prayer Time

Guest Acknowledgement

Congregational Song – “Hosanna (Praise Is Rising)”

Greeting Time

Congregational Song – “Holy, Holy, Holy (Savior King)”

Special Music – “He Is” (Mark Ogburn)

Message Introduction Video – “Fear of Failure”

Message – “Fear Not, Facing Our Fears” Jake Thornhill, Pastor

Invitation Song – “Lord I Need You”

Decisions Announced and Guests Invited to Reception

Video Announcements

McGregor Baptist Church

Fort Myers, FL

April 20, 2014

11:00 a.m.

Rob Flint, Worship Pastor

Video – Countdown

Video – “Crucified”

Call to Praise – “Matthew 28”

Praise and Worship – “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today”

Baptism Music – “Since Jesus Came into My Heart”

Welcome – Dr. Powell

Special Music – “Let Everything That Has Breath”

Praise and Worship – “He Is Risen”

Praise and Worship – “Because He Lives”

Special Music – “It’s about the Cross”

Teaching Time – Dr. Powell

Song of Invitation – “In Christ Alone”

Offertory – Announcements via Video

Introduction of New Members

Postlude – CD Play

Mobberly Baptist Church
Longview, TX
June 8, 2014
8:15 a.m., 9:30 a.m., and 11:00 a.m.

Tim Whedbee, Worship Pastor

Orchestra Prelude – “Awesome God”

Announcement Video – “Mobberly Minute”

Baptism

Welcome – Tim Whedbee, Worship Pastor

Congregational Singing – “Jesus Saves”

Brief Words by Tim Whedbee, Worship Pastor

Congregational Singing – “Cornerstone”

Congregational Singing – “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)”

Offertory Prayer – Greg Martin, Stewardship Pastor

Adult Choir Anthem with Duet – “Your Grace Still Amazes Me”

Video Introduction to Sermon

Sermon – Dr. Glynn Stone, Pastor

Invitation – “I Surrender All”

Closing Words – Tim Whedbee, Worship Pastor

New Hope Church

Lorton, VA

June 22, 2014

11:00 a.m.

Stacey Manske, Creative Director

Worship Song – “Your Love Never Fails”

Welcome – Stacey Manske (Worship Leader)

Worship Song – “Savior King”

Worship Song – “Break Every Chain” (chorus only)

Message Video Bumper

Message – Rusty Coram, Pastor

Worship Song – “Worn”

Announcements/Set Up C&O – Rusty Coram, Pastor

Worship Song – “Break Every Chain”

Worship Song – “All My Fountains”

New River Church
Lake Wylie, SC
August 10, 2014
8:30 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 11:30 a.m., and 5:00 p.m.

Wayne Bolin, Worship Pastor

Pre-Service Announcement Loop

Video – “5 Before”

Video – Welcome, Giving, Some Information about Us

Congregational Song – “This Is Amazing Grace”

Congregational Song – “Man of Sorrows”

Offering and Announcements – Executive Pastor

Growth Group Video

Prayer – Executive Pastor Prays

Congregational Song – “Scandal of Grace”

Sermon Bumper (transition band off and Pastor onto stage)

Message – “Forgiveness”

Congregational Song – “Cornerstone”

Closing – Worship Pastor Closes

Exit Music – Band Playing “God’s Great Dance Floor”

North Phoenix Baptist Church

Phoenix, AZ

August 10, 2014

10:45 a.m.

Robert Comeaux, Executive Pastor for Worship

Countdown video (CD prelude music with announcement slides and countdown)

Congregational Singing – “From the Inside Out”

Congregational Singing – “Found in You”

Greeting and Shaking Hands – Robert Comeaux

Prayer for Elder Transition – Scott Savage, Teaching Pastor

Kids’ Dismissal, Announcements, and Offering Setup – Scott Savage

Congregational Singing – “This I Believe”

Congregational Singing – “Cornerstone”

Sermon Bumper Video

Message – Jason Whalen, Pastor

Congregational Singing – “One Thing Remains”

Church Business (new deacon approval) – Brandon Arneson, Deacon Chairman

Closing Comments and Blessing – Jason Whalen, Pastor

Postlude – CD or Pandora

NorthPointe Community Church

Fresno, CA

August 3, 2014

9:30 a.m.

Todd Anderson, Pastor of Worship

Song – “Let God Arise”

Song – “Your Love Never Fails”

Church News Video

Welcome and Further Announcements – Tonya Nichols, Director of Volunteer Ministries

Meet Someone New

Song – “At the Cross (Love Ran Red)”

Song – “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

Prayer – Todd Anderson, Pastor of Worship

Message – Shane Ham, Pastor of Adult Ministries

Song – “Lay It Down”

Message Conclusion – Shane Ham

Prayer – Shane Ham

Closing Reminders and Offering Set Up – Shane Ham

Song – “Guardian”

Oakwood Baptist Church
Chickamauga, GA
April 6, 2014
11:00 a.m.

Michael Cole, Worship Pastor

Video Announcements

Congregational Singing – “Glory to God Forever”

Congregational Singing – “God Is Able”

Offertory Prayer – Allen Farris, Pastor

Choir – “He Looked Beyond My Faults and Saw My Need”
(arr. Bradley Knight, soloist – Tim Keith)

Congregational Singing – “Grace that Is Greater” (chorus only)

Congregational Singing – “I Stand Amazed”

Message – Allen Farris, Pastor

Invitation – “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)”

Old Fort Baptist Church
Summerville, SC
October 26, 2014
9:30 a.m.

Jason Taylor, Music Pastor

Pre-Service music (CD)

Video Promotion – Operation Christmas Child

Welcome and Announcements – Rev. Randy Sorrow

Corporate Praise and Worship – “Sing for Joy” (Moen)

Meet and Greet

Corporate Praise and Worship – “Open up the Heavens” (Andrews)

Corporate Praise and Worship – “Open the Eyes of My Heart” (Baloche)

Offertory Prayer – Deacon

Worship Team Special – “Hosanna” (Hillsong)

Message – Dr. Eric Lethco

Response Song – “Hungry” (Scott)

Final Remarks

Closing Song – “Sing for Joy” (chorus only)

Post-Service Music (CD)

Pathways Community Church
Santee, CA
October 25 and 26, 2014
5:00 p.m., 9:00 a.m., and 10:45 a.m.

Justin Kent, Worship Pastor

Congregational Singing – “Open up the Heavens”

Welcome/Greet Time – Justin Kent

New Song Introduction – Justin Kent

Congregational Singing – “This I Believe”

Congregational Singing – “Your Great Love”

Sermon Roll in Video (Trunk or Treat)

Sermon – Phil Herrington, Pastor

Communion Introduction – Phil Herrington, Pastor

Communion – “Lord I Need You”

Prayer – Phil Herrington, Pastor

Announcement Video (Pathways Preview, October)

Offering – “Worthy, Worthy”

Prayer – Alyssa Welch

Redeemer Fellowship
Kansas City, MO
July 6, 2014
9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 5:00 p.m., and 7:00 p.m.

Wesley Crawford, Pastor of Worship

Band Prelude – “Cannot Have My Soul”

Welcome and Call to Worship – Wes Crawford, Pastor

Congregational Singing – “Let Us Love and Sing and Wonder”

Corporate Prayer of Confession (responsive reading)

Congregational Singing – “One Glance of Thine, Eternal Lord”

Assurance of Pardon (responsive reading)

Congregational Singing – “Satisfied”

Congregational Singing – “How Great Thou Art”

Offering Prayer

Offering Collection (with Band instrumental)

Scripture Reading – 1 John 5:1

Sermon

Communion Meditation and Call to the Table

Communion Hymn – “Sweet Deliverance”

Congregational Singing – “Sovereign Grace, O’er Sin Abounding”

Congregational Singing – “I Stand Amazed in the Presence”

Benediction

Ridgecrest Baptist Church

Dothan, AL

May 4, 2014

8:15 a.m.

Tim Willis, Minister of Music and Worship

Prelude

Video Presentation

Baptismal

Call to Worship – “Bless the Lord” (Adult Choir and Orchestra)

Prayer

Welcome to Guests

Congregational Praise – “Blessed Your Name”

Congregational Praise – “By Faith”

Congregational Praise – “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

Congregational Praise – “We Will Remember”

Offertory Prayer

Special Music – “Glorify You Alone” (Adult Choir and Orchestra)

Message

Invitation – “Lord I Need You”

Announcements

Roswell Street Baptist Church

Marietta, GA

August 3, 2014

11:00 a.m.

Joe Buckner, Minister of Music

Baptism (with musical underscore)

Call to Worship – “The Lord Our God”

Welcome – Dr. Ernest Easley, Senior Pastor

Congregational Singing – “Amazing Grace”

Anthem – “O Happy Day”

Offertory Prayer – Deacon of the Week

Anthem – “I Will Not Be Shaken”

Congregational Singing – “Whom Shall I Fear”

Message – Dr. Ernest Easley

Response Song – “My Heart Your Home”

Response Song – “As the Deer”

Announcements – Joe Buckner

Closing Song – “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)”

Sandals Church
Riverside, CA
August 2 and 3, 2014

Dex Alexander, Creative Director

Congregational Singing – “Your Love Never Fails”

Congregational Singing – “Salvation Is Here”

Welcome

Congregational Singing – “Cornerstone”

Congregational Singing – “Our God”

Greeting

Message – Colossians Summer Study, Week 10

Prayer

Call for Offering – Pastor

Congregational Singing – “Rise”

Dismissal

Second Baptist Church

Houston, TX

March 2, 2014

Larry Harrison, Pastor of Worship

Orchestral Pre-Service – “All Creatures of Our God and King”

Choral/Congregational Call to Worship –
“God of My Praise” with “How Great Is Our God”

Invocation – Terry Kurtz, Pastor of Students

Welcome – Lee Maxcy, Pastor of Administration

Song of Praise – “Christ Is Able” (chorus and congregation)

Offertory Prayer – Fred Williams, Deacon

Song of Praise – “Jesus Saves”

Song of Praise – “You Are My All in All”

Song of Praise – “To God Be the Glory”

Special Music – “Your Great Name” (Woodway Worship)
Featuring Choir and Duet, Larry and Kim Harrison

Sermon – Dr. H. Ed Young

Invitation – “Just as I Am”

Announcements – Lee Maxcy

Benediction – “For Thine Is the Kingdom”

Orchestral Postlude – “All Creatures of Our God and King”

Shades Mountain Baptist Church
Birmingham, AL
July 20, 2014
9:30 a.m.

Michael Adler, Worship Pastor

Countdown Video

Greeting and Scripture over Music Bed

Congregation Worship – “How Great Thou Art”

Congregational Worship – “The Only Name (Yours Will Be)”

Announcement Video

Recognition/Commissioning of Departing Staff Member

Congregational Worship – “Jesus Only Jesus”

Congregational Worship – “Before the Throne of God”

Congregational Worship – “I Will Not Be Shaken”

Video Bumper (to introduce sermon)

Sermon – Dr. Danny Wood

Congregational Response – “Jesus is Better / Nearer My God”

Offering – “Say Amen” (Worship Choir and Congregation)

Verbal Wrap-up, Recap of Theme (over music bed)

Closing Song – “The Only Name (Yours Will Be)”

Silverdale Baptist
Chattanooga, TN
August 10, 2014
11:00 a.m.

Steve Shoemaker, Worship Pastor

Countdown Video

Baptism

Choir Song – “We Believe”

Welcome – Pastor

Worship Song – “How Great Thou Art” (Baloche)

Worship Song – “Stronger”

Ministry Time

Worship Song – “Your Great Name”

Prayer – Worship Pastor

Message – Pastor

Invitation

Offering and Announcement Video – “The Scoop”

Prayer of Blessing – Pastor

Sugar Creek Baptist Church
Sugarland, TX
August 17, 2014
11:00 a.m.

Jonathan Singh, Associate Worship Leader

Pre-Service: CD

Gift of Worship

Welcome

Congregational Worship Song – “This Is Amazing Grace”

Baptism

Congregational Worship Song – “Here for You”

Congregational Worship Song – “Anchor”

Congregational Worship Song – “Oceans”

Offering

Video Announcement

Message – Mark Hartman, Pastor

Prayer

Invitation

Altar Song – “You Have Won Me”

Next Step Center

Mission Statement

Exit Music – “This Is Amazing Grace”

The Summit Church
Raleigh-Durham, NC
January 12, 2014
9:00 a.m.

Jonathan Welch, Worship Pastor

Brief Call to Worship over Song Introduction

Song – “Our God Is Unstoppable” (by Summit Worship)

Brief Welcome and Greeting – Jonathan Welch

Congregational Scripture Reading – Jonathan Welch

Exhortation Based on Scripture Reading – Jonathan Welch

Song – “All Creatures of Our God and King” (by Summit Worship)

Song – “Awesome” (by Charles Jenkins)

Prayer – Member of the Worship Team (our version of a prayer of invocation)

Video – Announcements

Pastoral Prayer – J.D. Greear, Pastor

Sermon – J.D. Greear

The Lord’s Supper – Todd Unzicker, Campus Pastor

Song – “Before the Throne of God Above” (Sovereign Grace)

Song – “Christ is Risen” (Matt Maher)

Offering – Campus Pastor

Announcement – Campus Pastor (campus-specific focus)

Missional Blessing – Campus Pastor (our version of a benediction)

The Village Church
Flower Mound, TX
September 7, 2014
9:00 a.m.

Michael Bleecker, Worship Pastor

Welcome and Announcements – Matt Chandler

Call to Worship – Michael Bleecker

Congregational Worship – “Look and See”

Congregational Worship – “Man of Sorrows”

Congregational Worship – “In Christ Alone”

Sermon – Matt Chandler

Communion – Matt Chandler

Congregational Worship – “Come to Me”

Congregational Worship – “Cornerstone”

Response – Michael Bleecker

Response Worship – “Glorious Day”

Response Worship – “Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery”

APPENDIX 6

EXAMPLES OF THE RHYTHM OF TRANSCENDENCE THEN IMMANENCE IN WORSHIP SERVICE PLANNING

My thesis argued that in divine-human worship encounters, the Bible describes a specific order and priority concerning God's transcendent attributes and his immanent characteristics. More specifically, chapter 7 of this dissertation demonstrated a repeated biblical pattern in which divine-human encounters depict God in his transcendent otherness both prior to immanence and as the framework within which his immanence can only be rightly understood and experienced. The acknowledgement and application of this descriptive pattern can positively impact the liturgies of the free church, the mindset of believers as they approach God in worship, and the ethos of worship as men and women gather in community to worship their God. What are the practical ways to think about and incorporate the rhythm of transcendence then immanence in worship planning and design?

To apply the principle of transcendence then immanence, worship leaders must reprogram their thinking that a worship service is required to begin with a fast and celebrative song of praise for what God has done (see chapter 3 for data to support the assertion that many worship pastors in Southern Baptist churches tend to open their worship services with celebrative, fast-tempo songs that celebrate God's work). The challenge with beginning a service with celebrative praise for what God has done is that it misses the mark of beginning with and acknowledging God's self-revelation of who he

is. Worship pastors should not assume that their congregations enter into the places of corporate worship with a clear picture of the greatness, glory, and holiness of God. In fact, the contrary is more likely. As discussed in chapter 2, the age of immanence coupled with the age of individualism has moved God off of his place of centrality to the periphery in the minds and hearts of many believers. A recovery of the appropriate context of Christian worship coupled with a biblical vision of the magnificence, greatness, and glory of the one who has summoned and invited believers to worship him must be established from the very beginning of the service. Therefore, I would propose a more biblically informed paradigm for the opening of the service that would look like the following:

Part 1 – The Revelation of God. Essentially, Part 1 is the revelation of God in his transcendent glory. Declare God’s greatness, majesty, glory, holiness, power, et al. (transcendent attributes) through Scripture reading, through the spoken word peppered with theologically rich biblical content, through song, or through other carefully chosen elements. As you paint a portrait of divine transcendence, issue God’s invitation to your church to worship him.

Part 2 – The People’s Response. Enable the congregation to respond to God in song, prayer, exaltation, contrition, praise, or adoration for who he is (and then what he has done).

The following are suggestions that implement this kind of revelation-response opening sequence.

Example 1

This example uses the concept of God as the prime initiator in worship and people as the invited guests to establish God as the transcendent one who condescends to allow believers to join him at the worship table.

Part 1 (The Revelation of God). The worship leader states the following:

Good morning, and welcome to this service of worship offered to our great God. Today, we stand in a long line of Christ-followers who have heard the ancient call—the ancient summons of a holy God—to come and worship him. We are here at his invitation. We are invited into his presence through no merit of our own but through the gracious and undeserved decision of the one who is infinite to allow those who are finite into his presence. So we come expectantly and humbly in response to God’s invitation to worship him today.

Part 2 (The People’s Response). The congregation sings a song of worship in response to the invitation of the holy and infinite God of wonder. Worship songs could include songs of adoration such as “10,000 Reasons,” “How Great Thou Art,” “Here I Am To Worship” or “Come, Let Us Worship and Bow Down”

Alternate Part 2 (Continued Revelation Followed by the People’s Response). The congregation could be invited to read a passage of Scripture responsorially to continue to establish the transcendent nature of the one who the worshipers are gathered to worship. The worship pastor would say: *Please read the words of Scripture appearing in bold with me.*

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
there is no end to his greatness.
One generation shall praise your works to another
and shall declare your power.
All your works praise you, Lord,
and your faithful servants bless you.
They make known the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your power.
My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord:
Let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.

—based on Psalm 145:3-4, 10-11, 21¹

Then, the congregation would sing songs of adoration such “10,000 Reasons,” “How Great Thou Art,” “Here I Am To Worship” or “Come, Let Us Worship and Bow Down.”

Example 2

This example employs Scripture read by the worship pastor (or other leader) to establish the context of God’s transcendent, uncontainable immensity.

Part 1 (The Revelation of God).² The worship pastor makes the following statement: *As we begin our service of worship today, listen to the Word of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah in chapter 66:1-2:*

Thus says the Lord:
“Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?
All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be,
declares the Lord.
But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.”

As we worship this morning, may our minds and hearts be reminded again not only of the majesty and glory and power and greatness of our God, but also may we be reminded of our great need for him. May God look upon our hearts and find them humble and contrite as we enter into worship. I invite you to stand and sing, “Behold Our God.”

¹*The Worship Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids: The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Faith Alive Christian Resources, and Baker Books, 2004), 749.

²This example is taken from a service that was crafted by Joseph Crider, worship leader for The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary’s chapel service, Louisville, KY, September 16, 2014.

Part 2 (The People’s Response with Continued Revelation). The

congregation stands and sings, “Behold Our God”—a song that provides for both the continued revelation of God’s transcendent nature and the people’s response.

Who has held the oceans in His hands?
Who has numbered every grain of sand?
Kings and nations tremble at His voice;
All creation rises to rejoice.

Behold our God seated on His throne;
Come, let us adore Him.
Behold our King—nothing can compare;
Come, let us adore Him.

Who has given counsel to the Lord?
Who can question any of His words?
Who can teach the One who knows all things?
Who can fathom all His wondrous deeds?

Who has felt the nails upon His hands?
Bearing all the guilt of sinful man,
God eternal, humbled to the grave,
Jesus, Savior, risen now to reign.

You will reign forever!
Let Your glory fill the earth!³

Example 3⁴

This example uses a Scripture passage read responsively with the congregation to highlight God’s transcendent rule and reign over his creation.

³Jonathan Baird, Meghan Baird, Ryan Baird, and Stephen Altrogge, “Behold Our God” (Sovereign Grace Worship ASCAP/Sovereign Grace Praise BMI, 2011).

⁴This example is adapted from a service that was crafted by Joseph Crider, worship leader for The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary’s chapel service, Louisville, KY, September 16, 2014.

Part 1 (The Revelation of God). The worship leader says the following:

There is a wonderfully designed rhythm to corporate worship—the rhythm of God’s revelation and our response. We begin this morning thinking about God’s self-revelation recorded in his word. Would you read the following Scripture responsively with me from Revelation 7:9-12?

LEADER: After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice,

PEOPLE: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

LEADER: And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying,

PEOPLE: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

Behold our God, seated on His throne! Come let us adore him! Behold our King, nothing can compare. Come, let us adore him!

Part 2 (The People’s Response). The congregation stands and sings “Behold

Our God” combined with the chorus to “O Come, All Ye Faithful” as recorded by Matt Redman on Passion’s *Sacred Revolution*.

O come let us adore Him,
O come let us adore Him,
O come let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord!

For You alone are worthy,
For You alone are worthy,
For You alone are worthy,
Christ the Lord!

We’ll give You all the glory,

We'll give You all the glory,
We'll give You all the glory,
Christ the Lord!⁵

Example 4⁶

This example uses a pastoral reflection about God as creator to establish the context of God's wholly otherness than his creation.

Part 1 (The Revelation of God). The worship leader says the following:

Good morning and welcome to worship. This is the time when we, as a gathered body of believers, focus our mind's attention and our heart's affection on God and, in humility, glorify him first for who he is and then for what he has done. As we begin today, we remember that God first reveals himself to humanity as Creator, absolutely and totally distinct from his creation. This Creator-creature distinction is foundational for understanding the incredible transcendence of God—and the best beginning point for worship. We come as creatures, created by God, created for God, and, amazingly, created in the image of God to declare the praise of his glory and to make much of who he is. Would you stand together as we sing “All Creatures of our God and King”?

Part 2 (The People's Response). The congregation stands and sings “All Creatures of Our God and King.”

All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing

⁵Teryl Bryant and Matt Redman, arrangers, “O Come, Let Us Adore Him,” on *Sacred Revolution* (admin. by worshiptogether.com Songs, 2003).

⁶This example is adapted from a service that was crafted by Charles Lewis, worship leader for The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's chapel service, Louisville, KY, September 9, 2014.

Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam,

O praise Him, O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
Ye clouds that sail in heav'n along,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou rising moon in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of evening find a voice,
O praise Him, O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Let all things their Creator bless.
And worship Him in humbleness,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, Three in One,
O praise Him, O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!⁷

Example 5⁸

These two examples use a psalm to introduce the concept of God's transcendent holiness.

Part 1a (The Revelation of God). The worship leader says the following:

Good morning. Welcome to our service of worship. Today we begin by focusing on the holiness of God. Holiness is perhaps one of the most distinguishing characteristics of God and helps us to understand that our God is not one of us—that our King is gloriously

⁷Francis of Assisi, "All Creatures of Our God and King," paraphrased by William H. Draper, in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 11.

⁸These examples are adapted from services that were crafted by Joseph Crider worship leader for The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's chapel service, Louisville, KY, August 21 and September 30, 2014.

sinless, and he reigns in infinite perfection. Psalm 99 is a great example for us of how to think about God in his holiness. Would you read along silently with me as I read out loud Psalm 99?

The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
The Lord is great in Zion;
he is exalted over all the peoples.
Let them praise your great and awesome name!
Holy is he!
The King in his might loves justice.
You have established equity;
you have executed justice
and righteousness in Jacob.
Exalt the Lord our God;
worship at his footstool!
Holy is he!

Would you stand together with me and declare this great truth about God as we sing “Holy, Holy, Holy”?

Part 2a (The People’s Response with Continued Revelation). The people stand and sing “Holy, Holy, Holy,” which serves both to continue revelatory thinking about God as well as provide for an appropriate response to God’s holiness.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
Which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.⁹

Part 1b (The Revelation of God—Establishing the Transcendence of God as the Context for Worship). The worship leader says the following: *Good morning and welcome to our service of worship. Psalm 47 focuses on God as the King of the universe. Listen to verses one and two: “Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with a jubilant cry. For Yahweh, the Most High, is awe-inspiring, a great King over all the earth.” Would you join me in this responsive reading also from Psalm 47 as we prepare our hearts to sing to the King?*

Leader: God ascends among shouts of joy, the Lord, among the sound of trumpets.

People: Sing praise to God, sing praise; sing praise to our King, sing praise!

Leader: Sing a song of wisdom, for God is King of all the earth.

People: God reigns over the nations; God is seated on His holy throne. Sing praise to God, sing praise; sing praise to our King, sing praise!

Part 2b (The People’s Response). The people stand and sing, “Sing to the King.”

Sing to the King who is coming to reign,
Glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain.
Life and salvation His empire shall bring,
And joy to the nations when Jesus is King.

Come, let us sing a song,
A song declaring that we belong to Jesus.
He is all we need.

⁹Reginald Heber, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 68.

Lift up a heart of praise,
Sing now with voices raised to Jesus.
Sing to the King!

For His returning we watch and we pray;
We will be ready, the dawn of that day.
We'll join in singing with all the redeemed,
When Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King¹⁰

Example 6

This example uses a scriptural paraphrase presented as a litany followed by a song that begins by contemplating the transcendent Creator God and then moves toward God's immanent redemptive provision for his fallen creation through Christ.

Part 1 (The Revelation of God). The worship pastors says: *Good morning and welcome to the time when our church gathers together to worship our great creator, God. As we begin, would you contemplate the Word of the Lord and read out loud the portions that appear in bold?*

In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless, desolate, and covered by darkness. Then God commanded, "Let there be light," and light appeared. **And God was pleased with what he saw.** Then God separated the light from the darkness, the earth from the sea. **And God was pleased with what he saw.** God commanded, "Let the earth produce all kinds of plants, those that bear grain and those that bear fruit." **And God was pleased with what he saw.**

God made the sun to rule over the day, and the moon and stars to rule over the night. **And God was pleased with what he saw.** God said, "Let the water be filled with many kinds of living creatures, and let the air be filled with birds." **And God was pleased with what he saw.** Then God commanded, "Let the earth produce all kinds of animal life." **And God was pleased with what he saw.**

God created human beings, making them to be like himself, and put them in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals. "I have provided all kinds of grain

¹⁰Billy Foote and Charles Silvester Horne, "Sing to the King" (worshiptogether.com Songs/admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishers, 2003).

and all kinds of fruit for you to eat; but for all the wild animals and for all the birds I have provided grass and leafy plants for food.” **God looked at everything he had made, and God was very pleased.** Then the Lord God placed man and woman in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and to guard it. **The earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it belongs to the Lord! Praise be to God, Creator of heaven and earth!**¹¹

He is Creator; we worship him today and the work of his hands. Would you stand and sing your praise to the Lord?

Part 2 (The People’s Response). The people stand and sing “Creation Sings the Father’s Song.”

Creation sings the Father’s song;
He calls the sun to wake the dawn
And run the course of day
‘Til evening falls in crimson rays.
His fingerprints in flakes of snow,
His breath upon this spinning globe,
He charts the eagle’s flight;
Commands the newborn baby’s cry.

(Chorus) Hallelujah! Let all creation stand and sing,
“Hallelujah!” Fill the earth with songs of worship;
Tell the wonders of creation’s King.

Creation gazed upon His face;
The ageless One in time’s embrace
Unveiled the Father’s plan
Of reconciling God and man.
A second Adam walked the earth,
Whose blameless life would break the curse,
Whose death would set us free
To live with Him eternally.

Creation longs for His return,
When Christ shall reign upon the earth;
The bitter wars that rage
Are birth pains of a coming age.

¹¹*The Worship Sourcebook*, 378.

When He renews the land and sky,
All heav'n will sing and earth reply
With one resplendent theme: The glories of our God and King!¹²

Example 7

This example demonstrates a worship service that immediately begins by using a revelatory song to establish God's transcendence as the context for worship.

Part 1 (The Revelation of God). A soloist begins to sing the chorus to Chris Tomlin's "King of Glory" reflectively accompanied by an ethereal string pad underscore (perhaps the soloist could be stationed in the balcony or another unusual location).

Who is this King of Glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty.
Who is this King of Glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty.

Part 2 (The People's Response and Continued Revelation). Once the above solo is completed, the band segues to a brief introduction of "King of Glory." Then, the congregation is asked to stand and respond in worship. "King of Glory" is both a song of response and a song of the revelation of God's condescension to earth to bring hope and grace to a fallen world.

Lift up your gaze, be lifted up.
Tell everyone how great the love,
The love come down from heaven's gate,
To kiss the earth with hope and grace.

Who is this King of Glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty.
Who is this King of Glory?

¹²Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, and Stuart Townend, "Creation Sings the Father's Song" (Thankyou Music/admin. by worshiptogether.com Songs, 2008).

The Lord, strong and mighty.

There is one God, he is holy.
There is one Lord over everything.
There is one King, he is Jesus.
King of glory, strong and mighty.

You are the King of glory,
The Lord, strong and mighty!¹³

Example 8

This example uses silence, screen prompts, and video imagery to guide worshipers through the opening focus on God in his wholly otherness.

Part 1 (The Revelation of God). Lights are lowered during this time. The following screens appear slowly with an ethereal string pad underscore.

Screen 1 – The heavens declare the glory of God.

Screen 2 – The skies proclaim the words of his hands.

Screen 3 – Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

Screen 4 – Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Screen 5 – He set the earth on its foundations.

Screen 6 – At his thundering command, the mountains rose and the valleys sank.

Screen 7 – He causes the grass to grow and the earth to bring forth food.

Screen 8 – O Lord, how manifold are your works. In wisdom you have made them all.

Screen 9 – O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.

As the last screen appears, the introduction of “Creation Calls” begins. Then, the choir, soloists, and children’s choirs sing “Creation Calls” with visual interpretation provided by a montage of footage from *Planet Earth*.¹⁴

¹³Jesse Reeves and Chris Tomlin, “King of Glory” (worshiptogether.com Songs/admin. by EMI/Christian Music Publishing and sixsteps Music/admin. by EMI/Christian Music Publishing, 2004).

I have felt the wind blow, whispering your name.
I have seen your tears fall when I watch the rain.

How could I say there is no God,
When all around creation calls,
A singing bird, a mighty tree,
The vast expanse of open sea.

Gazing at a bird in flight, soaring through the air,
Lying down beneath the stars, I feel your presence there.

I love to stand at ocean's shore,
And feel the thundering breakers roar,
To walk through golden fields of grain,
'Neath endless blue horizon's frame,

Listening to a river run, watering the earth,
Fragrance of a rose in bloom, a newborn's cry at birth.

I believe!¹⁵

Part 2 (The People's Response). The people are encouraged to reverently stand before their Creator God and sing "How Great Is Our God" and the chorus to "How Great Thou Art."

How great is our God!
Sing with me, "How great is our God!"
And all will see how great,
How great is our God!

The splendor of the King, clothed in majesty,
Let all the earth rejoice, all the earth rejoice.
He wraps himself in Light, and darkness tries to hide,
And trembles at His voice, trembles at His voice.

¹⁴*Planet Earth*, BBC Worldwide Ltd (distributed in the USA by Warner Home Video, Inc., 2007). *Planet Earth* is a montage of high definition video footage capturing God's magnificent creation and creativity demonstrated throughout the planet.

¹⁵Brian Doerksen, "Creation Calls" (Mercy/Vineyard Publishing/admin. by Vineyard Music USA, 1994).

Age to age He stands, and time is in His hands,
Beginning and the end, beginning and the end.
The Godhead Three in One: Father, Spirit, Son,
The Lion and the Lamb, the Lion and the Lamb.¹⁶

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee;
How great thou art! How great thou art!
The sings my soul, my Savior God to thee;
How great thou art! How great thou art!¹⁷

¹⁶Chris Tomlin, Jesse Reeves, and Ed Cash, “How Great Is Our God” (Alletrop Music BMI/admin. by Music Service and worshiptoother.com Songs/sixsteps Music ASCAP/admin. by EMI CMG Publishing, 2004).

¹⁷Stuart K. Hine, “How Great Thou Art,” in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 6.

APPENDIX 7

AN EVANGELICAL, NEO-LITURGICAL EXPRESSION OF WORSHIP

A portion of the free evangelical church has begun to voluntarily embrace older liturgical formats in new and fresh ways. Espoused by Bryan Chapell in *Christ Centered Worship* and by Mike Cospser in *Rhythms of Grace*, the neo-liturgical format provides a theological foundation upon which to build a worship service derived from Isaiah’s amazing encounter with God recorded in Isaiah 6. This format provides a biblically dialogic template upon which to shape the God-man encounter of worship. This format also employs the rhythm of transcendence then immanence as the initial building block upon which all of the remaining portions of the service find their roots and context. I will use Bruce Leafblad’s terminology—”evangelical worship”—to describe this neo-liturgical format which combines the dialogic conversation between God and Isaiah with the addition of Christ’s New Testament mandate to remember him through the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper.

Essentially, the “evangelical worship” model sequentially moves through revelation, adoration, confession, assurance of pardon, thanksgiving, petition and intercession, instruction from God’s Word, communion, charge, and benediction.¹ The following paragraphs briefly describe the role and function of each segment.

¹According to Bryan Chapell, this evangelical or gospel-shaped model employed for the construction of a worship service contains “all of the necessary components that the heart longs (and needs)

Revelation. “Evangelical worship” seeks to re-enact the great redemptive story of God in Christ, accurately and sequentially tell story of the biblical metanarrative, and faithfully represent God in his transcendent otherness before focusing on God’s gracious condescension toward mankind. The evangelical worship model begins with the recognition of the greatness and goodness of God.² No one can force God to reveal himself. The worship leader can only “make provision for the Lord to disclose himself through the primary means of revelation God has used through the centuries, namely, his Word.”³ The worship leader should fill this opening revelatory segment with Scripture or songs in a way that communicates God’s nature and his character.

Adoration. The appropriate human response to the revelation of God is humble adoration and praise in ascribing ultimate worth, value, love, and allegiance to God. Adoration praises God for both his intrinsic nature and his works. Practical methods of adoration include using Scripture that ascribes greatness to God, prayers of adoration, songs of adoration, antiphonal responsive readings, choral anthems, creeds, the *Gloria*, and the Doxology. The vocabulary of adoration includes words like “praise,

to express in order to be consistent with the gospel it claims” (Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009], 101). Though few liturgical models exist in the Old or New Testament, when they do, this gospel contour and gospel approach can be readily identified. Most of its parts can be seen in Sinai Worship (Deut 5), in Solomon’s temple worship (2 Chr 5-7), in spiritual worship described by Paul in Romans 11-15, and in eschatological worship described in Revelation 4 (Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 103-111). Perhaps the most vivid depiction of gospel worship, its component parts, and its contour or movement can be seen in Isaiah 6.

²Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 86.

³Bruce Leafblad, “Evangelical Worship: A Biblical Model for the Twenty-First Century,” in *Experience God in Worship*, ed. Michael D. Warden (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2000), 107.

thank, love, exalt, extol, exult, rejoice, magnify, glorify, bless, lift up, shout, fear, long, desire, delight, hunger, thirst, adore, and revere.”⁴

Confession. The time of confession allows for the proper contextualization of the gospel. “Good News” is not really good unless the “bad news” is first acknowledged. Confession acknowledges our need for pardon and our dependence on the mercy of God. Confession and repentance go hand in hand. Repentance acknowledges not only our sinful deeds but also our sinful nature.⁵ We commit sins; we are sinful people. Repentance and confession must address both. Confession is a common biblical response to a personal encounter with God.⁶ From a practical standpoint, the modern church can move through this element in a variety of ways: silently, individually, corporately reading a scriptural confession (e.g., Ps 51), a unison reading of a historical prayer, a responsive reading of a psalm, certain choral pieces (e.g., “Lord, Have Mercy”), the corporate singing of a penitent hymn, and physically bowing down before God. The vocabulary for confession includes words like “contrition, brokenness, sorrow, humility, shame, grief, repentance, honesty, and admission of guilt” and other confessional themes that include “pleas for mercy, the unfailing love of God, and the great compassion of God.”⁷

Assurance of pardon. The significance of the assurance of pardon lies in the promise of full atonement in Christ, by Christ, and through Christ to those who confess

⁴Leafblad, “Evangelical Worship,” 108.

⁵A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship? A Call to True Worship*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wing Spread Publishers, 1985), 72.

⁶Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 88.

⁷Leafblad, “Evangelical Worship,” 108.

their sins. This element is grace-saturated and gospel-rich. The worship leader or pastor, however, must be sensitive not to represent himself as the one who grants pardon or absolution. Forgiveness can only be granted by Christ, not by any human. In a practical way, the pastor can offer the assurance of pardon through a pulpit prayer or words of Scripture (e.g., Ps 103:7-12; Isa 53:4-6; 1 John 1:9). In addition, certain hymns sung by the congregation or certain choral anthems convey a biblical sense of God's mercy, grace, and pardon. The vocabulary of this segment touches on themes like God's faithfulness, mercy, patience, and love. Other themes might include Christ's finished work on the cross and the comprehensiveness of atonement.

Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is the natural response of a person that has experienced the forgiving grace and mercy of God. Gratitude overflows from a heart that has been gripped by the reality of the gospel.⁸ The church can express thanksgiving through prayer, song, or in a more tangible way such as giving an offering back to the Lord. Thanksgiving can also be offered through a personal testimony of praise or the reading of a Scripture passage.⁹ The vocabulary of thanksgiving includes genuine gratitude, humility, joy for cleansing, freedom in Christ, freedom from the bondage of sin, praise, hallelujah, love, and devotion.

Petition and intercession. The progression of the evangelical worship model is upward, inward, outward. The inward portion of the worship journey culminates with petition while the outward portion of the journey begins with intercession. In petition,

⁸Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 92.

⁹Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 148.

the church asks for God's help in living a holy, fully-devoted life in Christ. Through intercession, the church prays on behalf of others. Both petition and intercession can be led by way of a pastoral prayer, elder/deacon-led prayer, silent personal prayer, voiced prayers from the congregation on behalf of others, or singing songs of petition (e.g., "Heal Our Land").¹⁰ The character of petition and intercession includes dependence, desperation, hope, confidence, helplessness, and neediness. It also recognizes the absolute sovereignty of God who is never surprised by the actions of humanity and who never mismanages the world he created.

Instruction. The preaching and teaching of Scripture is central to Christian worship. This portion of the worship service highlights the reading of the ancient texts contained in the Bible that record the story and revelation of God in Scripture. The pastor then explains its meaning and makes application to the life of the believer. The character of instruction could be declarative, prophetic, pastoral, edifying, admonishing, or didactic. In addition to the sermon, this segment also could include baptism, recitation of creeds, times of ordaining, commissioning, and personal testimony. Post-sermon responsive hymns may also be included in this portion of the worship service. Songs of response include words such as "yield, submit, offer, give, commit, surrender, sacrifice, dedicate, follow, obey, and present."¹¹

Communion. For most of church history, communion has taken a central position in the service of worship of gathered believers. Rooted in the Old Testament

¹⁰Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 149.

¹¹Leafblad, "Evangelical Worship," 109.

Passover commemoration of the Exodus, the New Testament communion gives a foretaste of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Through communion, the church remembers Christ's past work of redemption, Christ's present work of perpetual mediation before God on behalf of believers, and Christ's future return to gather his church and to reign eternally over a new heaven and a new earth.¹² In many traditions, the faithful recite creeds and give offerings during this time. Communion can be served with the congregation seated, the congregation processing, or as a part of a congregational meal. The language of communion is primarily governed by Christ's words of institution found in the gospels as well as the words of Paul written originally to the church in Corinth. The ceremony of communion has a character of sober remembrance, overwhelming gratitude, awe and wonder, and expectant hope. Congregational singing or presentational songs may accompany this commemorative dramatic gospel reenactment.

Charge and blessing. This concluding portion of the service is often offered by the presiding pastor and includes a divine charge to faithfully live out the gospel as the gathered church reenters the world to be salt and light. The pastor may paraphrase or directly read the charge and blessing from Scripture, he may read an historic or contemporary writing, or he may speak the blessing extemporaneously. The charge and blessing may also include songs of benediction offered by the congregation or by the choir and exchanges of love and peace among the members of the congregation.¹³ The

¹²Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 55.

¹³Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 149.

expressions of charge and blessing include the language of commissioning, challenge, mission, sending, and empowering. The characteristics of blessing include God’s seal of protection, God’s favor, God’s promise, and God’s abiding presence.

A Neo-Liturgical Service Example

The following example illustrates a neo-liturgical worship service that is based on the “evangelical worship model” of Isaiah 6 outlined above. It offers an additional insight into how the rhythm of transcendence then immanence can be implemented into worship planning and design.¹⁴

Part I – Revelation and Call to Worship

Worship Leader: This morning, we gather together as the church of the living God to declare his praise, to sing of his greatness, and to worship in spirit and in truth. We are here by divine invitation. The ancient call of God to come extends to us...come into his presence with singing and his courts with praise. Today, we join our voices with thousands who have resonated God’s praise throughout the ages. As we begin, let us go to the Word and read together as we focus our minds and hearts on the unbelievable greatness of the God we worship.

Leader: (From Ps 99)
The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!

People: The Lord is great in Zion;
He is exalted over all the peoples.

Leader: Let them praise your great and awesome name!

Together: Holy is he!

Leader: Exalt the Lord our God;
worship at his footstool!

¹⁴For additional neo-liturgical designs, see Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009) or Mike Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church’s Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

Together: Holy is he!

Part II – Adoration

Congregational Singing: “Holy Is the Lord” (Chris Tomlin)

Part III – Confession

Worship Leader: *The journey into the presence of the Lord in worship is an amazingly wonderful and, at times, terrifying experience. As we approach God, we begin to see him more clearly for who he is—He is glorious, sinless, perfect, and holy. As the enormity of God’s holiness begins to settle in our spirits, we are confronted with the reality that we are not holy. We are not sinless. We are not perfect. Scripture repeatedly demonstrates that our approach to God must be coupled with confession and repentance both for specific sins and for the very fact that we are sinful people. As we enter into a time of confession, let us read together Scripture taken from Psalm 25. Please read the portions that are in bold.*

(Excerpted from Ps 25)

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;

**Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.**

Good and upright is the Lord;

therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right,

and teaches the humble his way.

**All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.**

For your name’s sake, O Lord,

pardon my guilt, for it is great.

Who is the man who fears the Lord?

Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.

Turn to me and be gracious to me,

for I am lonely and afflicted.

Consider my affliction and my trouble,

and forgive all my sins.

Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me!

Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

May integrity and uprightness preserve me,

for I wait for you.

Would you take this moment to silently confess your sins before the Lord?

[SILENT PRAYERS OF THE CONGREGATION]

Prayer offered by a lay leader [WORDS APPEAR ON THE SCREEN]:

Almighty and merciful God, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things that we ought to have done; and we have done those things that we ought not to have done. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare those who confess their faults. Restore those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to the world in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And grant, O merciful God, for his sake, that we may live a holy, just, and humble life to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.

Optional Choral Meditation: “Lord, Have Mercy” (arr. Bradley Knight)

Part IV – Assurance of Pardon

Senior Pastor: *Hear the good news!* [ON SCREEN]

“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him. For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust. But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.” (from Ps 103:8, 13, 14, 17)

The promise of God is this: “If we are confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Know that your sins are forgiven, and be at peace.

Thanks be to God.

Part V – Thanksgiving and Baptism

Congregational Song of Response – “Jesus, Thank You” or “Before the Throne of God Above.”

Worship Leader: *God has given us two dramatic pictures of the Gospel to remind us of the great redemptive story we have been invited into. In just a moment, Sara Jacobs will be coming to publicly profess her faith in Jesus Christ to you, her new church family. As we prepare to celebrate believer’s baptism, let us also profess our faith together:*

[ON SCREEN]

Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father, almighty.**

From there, he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.¹⁵**

***Pastor:** Sara Jacobs is coming today to make her public profession of her faith by obediently following Christ in believer's baptism. Sara, do you believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?*

Sara: I Do.

***Pastor:** Do you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins and rose again?*

Sara: I Do.

***Pastor:** Have you placed your faith and trust in Christ's finished work on the cross for you?*

Sara: I Have.

***Pastor:** Do you confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior?*

Sara: I Do.

***Pastor:** Then Sara, I gladly baptize you my sister in the name of the Father who loves you, the Son who gave his life for you, and the Holy Spirit who lives in you.
[IMMERSE] You are buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life!*

Part VI: Petition and Intercession

¹⁵This confession is based on the Apostles' Creed found in the *Worship Source Book*, 153.

Worship Leader: *What a beautiful picture of the gospel! Christ died, Christ rose, and Christ is coming again! He exchanged his righteousness for our filthy rags, his strength for our fear. He gave us joy in place of mourning. He gave us hope in place of despair. He calls us now to live a holy life in a world that is desperately dark. We are to be salt and light, and a walking re-presentation of the good news of the gospel of Christ.*

Before we begin to study God's word this morning, let us go before the Lord to ask for his help in living a holy life—that through the power of the Holy Spirit, he would enable us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to the Lord. This is our spiritual act of worship as we strive to live faithfully in the world but not of the world. As you pray for yourself, also pray for others that the Lord may bring to mind. Let us pray silently together.

[Silent Prayer]

Congregational Singing – “Be Thou My Vision”

Part VII – Instruction from God's Word

[SCRIPTURE READ BY LAY LEADER ON SCREEN]

Hear the Word of the Lord from Colossians 2:6-14:

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. ⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Leader: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: **Thanks be to God**

Sermon – “The Power of the Cross” (1 Cor 1:18-31)

[TRANSITION TO OFFERING SPOKEN BY THE PASTOR]

Jesus said, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt 10:8). There are many ways to respond to the gospel. One way is by giving. As an act of worship, in response to God’s mercy, we give back to him out of what he has blessed us with so that the church can remain strong and the name of Jesus can be proclaimed throughout the city, our state, our country, and our world. Let’s pray out loud this prayer together.

[ON SCREEN]

Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty. All that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours, and you rule over all. Therefore, Lord, receive these offerings, our tangible expressions of love and gratitude. Transform them into a source of life for many, so that your kingdom may grow in the hearts of all. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Congregational Song of Response/Offering – “The Power of the Cross”

Part VIII – Communion

Senior Pastor: *Today, we join together to celebrate the Lord and his finished work on the cross. Earlier in the service, we saw one of two Christ-commanded dramatic representations of the gospel—believer’s baptism. Now, we will experience together the second reenactment of the gospel through the Lord’s Supper. If you are a baptized believer in Christ and an active member of a Christian church, you are invited to come to Christ’s table to receive the elements of the Lord’s Supper this morning. If you are not a believer in Christ, we ask that you remain seated and contemplate the great love Christ has for you and the sacrifice of his life that he gave for you. Instead of receiving the elements this morning, perhaps this day would be the day when you receive Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.*

The Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.”

Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the saving death of the risen Lord until he comes. With thanksgiving, let us offer God our grateful praise. (based on 1 Cor 11:23-26)

[Great Prayer of Thanksgiving]

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right for us to give thanks and praise.

[Thanksgiving for the Work of God in Creation]

With joy we praise you, gracious God, for you created heaven and earth, made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—even when we fell into sin. We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord, who by his life, death, and resurrection opened to us the way of everlasting life. Therefore, we join our voices with all the saints and angels and the whole creation to proclaim the glory of your name.

[Acclamation of Praise]

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (based on Ps 118:26 and Isa 6:3)

[Thanksgiving for the Work of Christ]

We give thanks to God the Father that our Savior, Jesus Christ, before he suffered, gave us this memorial of his sacrifice, until he comes again.

At his last supper, the Lord Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, he took the cup after supper and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this in remembrance of me.”

For whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. (based on 1 Cor 11:23-26)

[Memorial Acclamation]¹⁶

Therefore, we proclaim our faith as signed and sealed in this sacrament:
Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

[The Lord’s Prayer]

Let us pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

**Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

[Passing of the Peace]

Thanks be to God: Christ makes us one. The peace of Christ be with you all.

¹⁶This Lord’s Supper sequence is adapted from the *Worship Source Book*, 308-9.

And also with you.

[Preparing the Bread and Cup]

[Breaking the bread]

The bread that we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

We who are many are one body, for we all share the same loaf.

[Pouring the cup]

The cup for which we give thanks is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

The cup that we drink is our participation in the blood of Christ.

[Communion]

Church of Jesus Christ, the Lord has prepared his table for all who love him and trust in him alone for their salvation. All who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who desire to live in obedience to him as Lord are now invited to come with gladness to the table of the Lord.

[Members process to the head of each aisle to receive communion.]

[As the bread is shared]

The body of Christ, given for you.

Thanks be to God.

[As the cup is shared]

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

Thanks be to God.

Songs of Praise – “Worthy Is the Lamb” and “When I Think About the Lord”

Part IX – Charge and Blessing

Senior Pastor: *It has been good to be together as a family today. As we leave, I remind you of the commission of Christ to go and to live a life honoring to him, preaching the gospel, teaching the gospel, living the gospel, and making disciples wherever you go.*

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 1:24-25)

You are dismissed.

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ABSTRACT

FAR AND NEAR: CHRISTIAN WORSHIP OF THE TRANSCENDENT AND IMMANENT GOD OF WONDERS

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“Far and Near: Christian Worship of the Transcendent and Immanent God of Wonders” examines the rhythm of transcendence then immanence represented in divine worship encounters and significant prayers recorded in Scripture. With the objective of determining how transcendence and immanence shapes modern worship services in Southern Baptist churches, this dissertation also documents the goals, values, and objectives that may influence how worship pastors in Southern Baptist churches select and sequence elements to be included in their corporate worship services.

Chapter 1 establishes the propensity of the modern church to bypass the transcendence of God while rushing to embrace God’s immanence. Chapter 2 discusses the age of immanence and individualism—two modern mindsets permeating religious thinking and corporate worship of many Christians in modern times. This chapter also discusses the residual effects of the loss of focus on God’s transcendence—the centralization of man coupled with the displacement of God from his rightful place of centrality in worship.

Using the findings of the Worship Design Project 2014, chapter 3 is an

empirical documentation of worship praxis and design by worship pastors in the most attended Southern Baptist churches in the United States. Chapter 4 discusses the biblical historical grounding of transcendence including God's transcendent holiness, aseity, sovereignty, constancy, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and timeless eternity. Chapter 5 considers how God's immanent attributes are rooted in and flow from his transcendent characteristics.

Chapter 6 is a Christological reflection on how Jesus Christ—God immanently with us—remains transcendent in relationship to his creation and his church. Chapter 7, the central focus of this dissertation, uses biblical data to demonstrate the rhythm of transcendence then immanence represented in divine worship encounters and prayer. Chapter 8 addresses the implications of properly balanced and ordered transcendence and immanence for modern worship service planning and design in the free church tradition.

The thesis advanced in this dissertation is that, in divine-human encounters, the Bible demonstrates a repeated pattern of conceptualizing and understanding God in his transcendent otherness both prior to his immanence and as the framework within which his immanence can only be rightly understood and experienced.

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