

## ***Why do we worship the way we do at Grace Covenant?***

On any given Sunday, the worship service at Grace Covenant is filled with folks from a wide variety of backgrounds. In fact, many did not grow up in any church, and of those who did, few of us grew up Presbyterian. Even within our own denomination, there is a range of worship styles and liturgy. So it is not surprising that questions naturally arise about our worship service. Below are some of the guiding principles we try to follow in our worship at Grace Covenant:

**1) Worship should be God-centered.** While this may seem obvious, many in our day have been trained to think that the congregation is the audience and that those leading the service are “performers” who are there to more or less entertain the congregation. However, the Biblical picture of worship is that we are all to participate, that all believers are priests with direct access to God through Christ. In that sense, we are all the “performers,” and God is our audience, taking delight in the thanks and praise that we bring Him. That is why we include things in our service which involve all of us such as responsive readings and congregational prayer. It is also why we emphasize congregational singing rather than an array of soloists or choirs. And so when we come to worship, we come not to be entertained, but to glorify and enjoy God.

**2) Worship should be bathed in the Gospel.** Because none of us are worthy enough to come into God’s holy presence, the worship service must continually remind us of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From start to end, the Gospel must be clear and celebrated – that we who believe are forgiven by the atoning death of Jesus on our behalf. We are saved and strengthened by God’s grace alone. This emphasis upon God’s grace means that we are not there to get every detail perfect, but to delight in Christ. Those who know they need God’s grace should always leave worship encouraged, because they have heard once again of God’s magnificent favor toward them in Jesus Christ. When people leave a service at Grace Covenant, we don’t want them thinking about what a great service it was, but about what a great Savior they have.

**3) Worship should be clearly Trinitarian.** We worship God the Father, through the mediation of His Son, and with the help of the Holy Spirit. To put this in more practical terms, because we are worshipping God

Almighty, we come with reverence and awe, not casually. At the same time, because we come in the name of Jesus, the Son of God, who gave Himself for us, we come confidently and without fear. And because we need help to worship truly, we come seeking the Holy Spirit’s blessing – so that our worship may be lively and joyful, Spirit-filled rather than manipulated by man. When we put this all together, because we worship a Triune God who is both holy and gracious, distant and close, our worship should be majestic and relaxed, reverent and lively, all at the same time.

**4) Worship should be Bible-based.** Someone once said that if you want to know how Presbyterians should worship, it is simply this: we read the Bible, preach the Bible, sing the Bible and pray the Bible. That is because the power of God is not found in human wisdom or productions but in His Word. That is one reason why our sermons are “expository,” which means that they attempt to interpret and apply particular texts of Scripture. Moreover, Presbyterians follow something called the “regulative principle” which in short means that our worship should be guided only by the instructions and guidance found in the New Testament. That means two things: first, we don’t just do whatever we want to in worship, but seek to do what God says pleases Him; and second, we should keep our worship simple and spiritual, relying upon God’s blessing of His Word and Prayer rather than our own innovation.

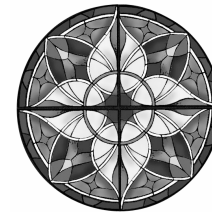
**5) Worship should be a family gathering.** Christian worship balances the fact that we all come individually to God, dealing with Him personally, and that we are part of a larger Body, the Church. That is why we include some aspects of our worship service which emphasize that we are Christ’s Body together, such as the sharing of Christ’s peace and corporate prayer. It is why we include such things as testimonies, missions reports, and greeting and saying farewell to members. This is also the reason that so many different members participate in leading the service, which helps keep the focus off of the pastors, and upon Christ as He is seen in the whole Body. We are God’s family, and our worship should reflect that. While some may object to such “horizontal” activities as part of worship, we ask, where is it that God dwells? The Bible says that we are now His holy temple! And we see Him best now when we see Him at work in one another. We especially recognize and celebrate our family relationship as we gather around the Lord’s Table once a month.

**6) Worship should be both catholic and local.** By catholic, we mean the older use of the word, that is, “universal.” There should be elements in our worship service which can be recognized by Christians from all traditions, nations and eras. This is why we worship on Sunday, universally recognized by the early church as the Lord’s Day. It is also why we include such standard elements as the Doxology, the Lord’s Prayer, and various Confessions of Faith. While we do not wish for any of these to become rote, including them adds a degree of stability and humility to our service – that we are connected to a Christian tradition much older and larger than ourselves. At the same time, our worship should make sense in our own culture, rather than trying to imitate some bygone Christian era or obscure liturgy. This idea also helps explain why you see a variety of dress in worship – some dressy, others quite casual. While we want people to come to worship reverently and modestly, we want our primary mark as Christians not to be our clothes, but our faith.

**7) Worship should be both traditional and contemporary.** We are determined at Grace Covenant not to fight any worship wars. Rather, we want to enjoy the “worship peace!” That means that we employ a variety of musical styles and tunes. We all have our own tastes, but we have consciously chosen to major on the Gospel and not any particular musical style. In fact, whenever we sing a song that does not particularly move you, it gives you a chance to grow in grace – in reminding yourself to focus on Christ and not your own preferences. Some of our tunes are centuries old, while others were written by some of our own members. This makes perfect sense to us because as above, the Gospel is both ancient and relevant. What better way to reflect that truth than singing songs old and new? Classic hymns connect us to the Church over the centuries, while more contemporary songs speak to our current setting. Likewise, grand tunes remind us of God’s majesty, while more folksy tunes remind us that God became a man like us.

This brings us back to the Gospel and its God-centeredness. The very reason God became a man was to offer Himself up as a perfect sacrifice for our sin, achieving eternal life for all who trust Him. God alone saves us, and so He alone receives glory. Every time we come to worship, our hearts should be filled with an undying gratitude for this incredible salvation through Christ our Lord. *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36)*

# Worship at *Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church*



2101 Shadow Lake Road  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24060  
(912) 552-3364  
[www.gracecovenanttpca.org](http://www.gracecovenanttpca.org)