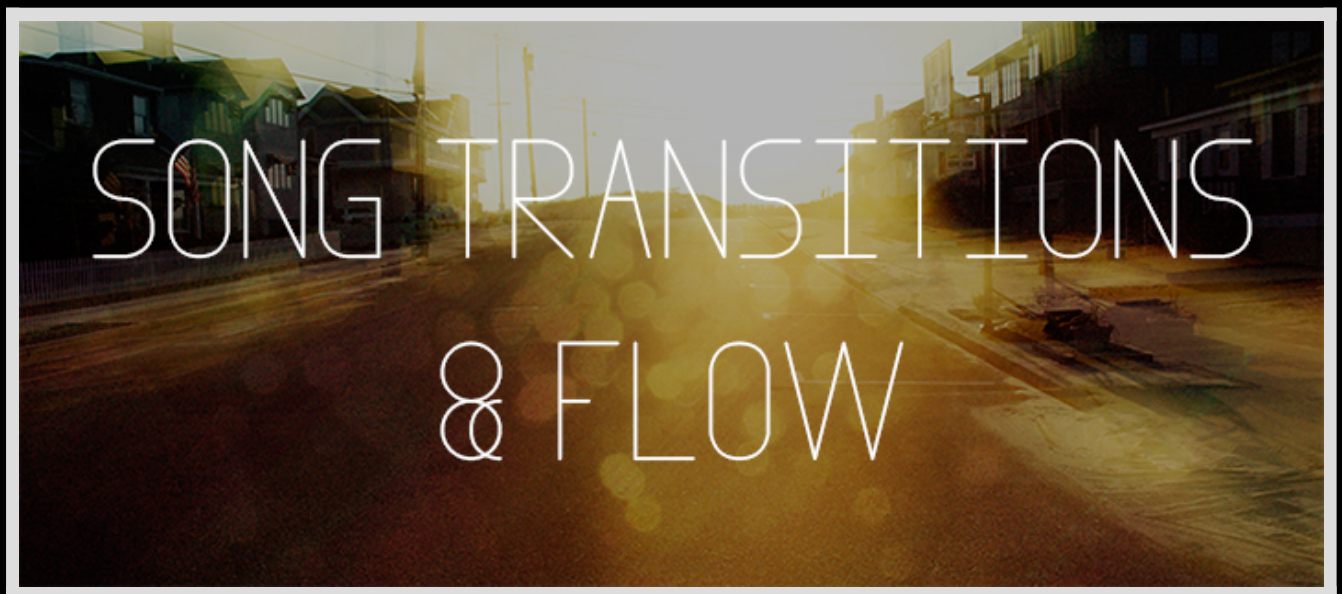




Song Transitions and Flow

Josh Pauley — June 26, 2013



One of the most effective ways you can create an atmosphere that encourages worship is to work on song transitions and the flow of service. This is something that isn't always given the attention it deserves, but it can completely transform a set list when done well. I usually plan time to sit down for at least an hour a day or two before the week's first rehearsal so I can work through what I want the transitions to be and how I want everything to flow. It is important to take this time to experiment a little without the pressure of the band waiting on instructions from you, and so you can clearly communicate the details to the band. This eliminates confusion during practice, and your band will appreciate that you aren't wasting their time trying to figure it out.

Here are the usual parts of the songs and worship set that I think through when preparing for Sundays. In no way is this an exhaustive list, just some of the most typical:

1. Song Keys. The first thing I figure out is what key each song is going to be in. If there is a song in the set that I consider to be the key song for the week or requires a large vocal range, I will usually start with that song first. Once I have locked in the key for the first song, I typically play through the other songs using the same key as the first and see if it feels comfortable vocally. If singing each song in the same key still allows for the right dynamics vocally and musically, then I'm done. If not, I will try to raise or lower the keys of the songs that didn't work by one whole step. I try to keep songs in the same key together in the set when I can, and I try not to use more than a couple of keys throughout the set; it doesn't always happen, but I try. I also avoid half step key changes when transitioning songs. It just sounds slightly awkward to me when I hear it.

2. Tempo. Next, I consider the tempo of each song and decide how I want to start and end the set. The following examples obviously change slightly depending on the tempo of the songs you will be using, but I find that the song flow usually follows one of these options: Fast – Upbeat – Medium – Slow (typical worship flow), Fast – Upbeat – Medium – Upbeat (ends on a "high note"), Slow – Medium – Medium – Slow (more intimate). There are endless options, but I would stay away from drastic tempo changes from song to song.

3. Be Creative. This is where the fun really starts. Don't lock yourself into always following the same song structure. Change it up and start a song on the chorus with just an acoustic guitar playing, then transition with the full band into the first verse. If you really want to end on a song with a medium tempo but you feel like you should end on a slower song, just have the band stop playing at the end. Then continue with just a guitar or piano playing lightly as you lead the congregation through the chorus a

few times. Using fewer instruments can make the song feel slower than it actually is most of the time.

4. Use The Band. Not every song should include stopping one song and starting a new one. I typically like to keep pads playing underneath every transition when possible and especially if the song is going to stay in the same key. If the next song starts with a specific instrument, I will try to find a way to end the previous song so that musician has time to

come in almost immediately with the next song. When transitioning like this, you just have to be sure your musicians know to leave just a bit of time for the ending of the previous song to actually resolve and breathe a little. Otherwise, the transition will not sound natural and will feel rushed.

5. Talking. I find it hard to do this in a way that feels authentic. It can be used to set the tone for the rest of the worship, but you have to be careful that you do not ramble, and that you clearly make your point in a way that propels people forward in their worship. You should try to stay away from speaking in between songs more than once. I like the flow of service best when announcements, offering, etc. are done before or after the worship set. I know a lot of churches will do announcements after the first song, and that's okay. I just find it easier to set the tone and create an atmosphere of worship when I can lead straight through a set.

6. Silence. You should avoid too much silence when transitioning songs unless it is being done on purpose. If it's taking longer for the band to come in because the drummer dropped their sticks, that would be bad silence. If you are creating a time of silence for people to stand in awe and reverence before God, then I'd consider that good silence. The important thing about creating this type of silence is to let people know somehow that it is on purpose. You can do this by simply saying, "Let's take a moment to just sit in silence and reflect." Silence also works best after songs that sing about God's grandeur and His holiness. I wouldn't try to use it after a song that is a call to worship. Doing that would create a level

of contradiction.

Thinking through these should get you started. Putting in the time before rehearsal shows you are respectful of the band's time and builds trust among those on your team because they see that you are ready. There will be times when what you plan will not work out once you are practicing with the full band, or you may have another idea and decide it will sound better. That's okay, and this is one of the reasons you prepared ahead. In fact, I typically change something in the first rehearsal because I find that a transition doesn't work as well as I thought, or once I hear the band playing their parts, it sparks an idea that works even better. Good song transitions and flow of service create a much more natural and freeing time of worship. So, put the time in to work through these, and don't be afraid to make changes during rehearsal when you need to. You will be amazed at what this can do for your service on Sundays!

In Leadership



Josh Pauley

 Posts  Website  Twitter  Google+

Josh joined the team at the beginning of 2013 and now manages all things digital for Worship Together, which includes running the website, overseeing all online content, and handling visual design. Prior to Worship Together he worked for a record label that includes artists such as Chris Tomlin, Matt Redman, David Crowder, and Kristian Stanfill. Josh leads worship in Nashville, enjoys trying out specialty coffee brewing methods, and heads outdoors on the weekends to hike, mountain bike, or camp with his wife Kaylee and their dog, Tucker.

8 responses to Song Transitions and Flow

Wanda Everette July 16, 2013 at 6:55 am

Hi Josh, Great Post! I have been on worship teams for years but have only lead this past year. I always find it difficult to speak, but I am getting more comfortable with it as time goes on. My question is a little off this conversation, but how do I engage the congregation? I've tried getting them to clap, asking them alone to sing, but still sometimes get blank stares. Do you have any suggestions?

Josh Pauley July 16, 2013 at 8:49 am

It's awesome that you've started leading! Engaging your church in worship and encouraging them is a challenge that all worship leaders face. I wrote a post that gives a few ideas for you to try out called [The Art of Disappearing](#). Check it out and let us know if you have any other questions!

Overall, enjoy the journey, love the people you lead, and encourage worship in a way that it creates a natural environment for people to engage versus trying to contrive something. The results will be more meaningful!

James July 9, 2013 at 8:34 pm

Excellent post. When it comes to transitions, I make them as brief as possible without sounding rushed or blocky. I NEVER speak unless it is absolutely necessary. I feel that the musical portion of a Sunday service is about God, not me (or the band). I also think that your third point about Creativity should come with a word of caution about putting too much performance into things. In my opinion, a perfect worship service will end with the congregation not even noticing the band or the leader, having spent the last few moments worshipping God fully. I find myself

adapting more and more modern worship songs to eliminate long instrumental passages. There is a time for us to sit and passively enjoy the presence of God, and there is a time when we should actively be sending our praises TO him. I think that Sunday morning falls into the latter category.

Josh Pauley July 9, 2013 at 8:47 pm

Good point James. The part about creativity is more about how we incorporate and transition songs and NOT about how cool the band sounds. Although we do hope it sounds great! Thanks for helping clarify.

You should also check out our recent post called Engaging Your Church in Worship – The Art of Disappearing. It speaks to the last part of your comment!

Clint July 9, 2013 at 4:06 pm

Josh, thanks for your comments on this subject. This is one of the things that I find most difficult to work through because of my work load throughout the week, with other ministries that fall under my purview.

I lead at a small church in NW Arkansas. I try to work with song keys to make them fit nicely, but find it hard to always do this with different voices. You touched a little on transitions when changing keys, and leaving time so that the transition doesn't feel rushed. (What is a good way to make this happen? What amount of time is not too awkward for the people in the congregation?) Also, I am slightly awkward when I do try to speak between songs. Do you or anyone else from WT have advice for someone that feels the need to say something at times, but may not with a fear of it falling flat?

Josh Pauley July 9, 2013 at 4:55 pm

It can be difficult to always find time and think through all of this. After doing it for a little while it does seem to get easier and take less time though! When trying to find a key that works for most

voices you should try staying in the A-C range. I can't remember where I read it but a few years ago I read an article on research that had been done and determined that the majority of people could sing comfortably in that range. For me personally I find my voice has the most dynamic range when songs are in Bb or B. Your goal when transitioning songs is to make it feel natural. It's hard to say what amount of time is not too long or short because it really depends on the song you are transitioning from and the song you are transitioning to, along with numerous other considerations. My advice would be to really pay attention to these as you practice. As you and the band pay more attention to them you will begin to figure out what you can do to make them better. As for speaking, I speak very little during worship. Usually only if I really feel I have something that is worth saying. In those moments I try to say what I feel I'm being led to say and then continue with the next song. The band usually has already begun playing underneath me while I'm speaking so that we can go straight into the song without it feeling unnatural. Again, when you do speak in between songs you want it to be as natural as possible. If it feels too planned it probably will not have as much impact either. I hope that this helps a little more. Thanks for reaching out to us and we are happy to have you join the conversation!

Danny Orlando July 1, 2013 at 2:50 pm

At LIFT we heard Louie encourage leaders to speak between songs, if even for a sentence or two. I appreciate your thoughts, but the differences sort of confused me. Although some bands have keyboards and lots of member, you should try to write for the smaller bands. We have bass, percussion, 1-2 guitars and that's it. We do a fine job, but so much of what you said just doesn't apply. As well as the band members a have full-time jobs so practice is a luxury

Josh Pauley July 1, 2013 at 3:54 pm

Hey Danny, there isn't anything wrong with speaking in between songs. My point was, when speaking we have to be careful not to ramble or disrupt the worship that is taking place. Saying something

that encourages people in worship is definitely a plus. Only you can decide if speaking in between songs is encouraging worship or interfering with worship. If you watch some of the worship leaders that are often in public view (Matt Redman for instance, since you referenced LIFT) they do not talk between every song during worship services and sometimes do not talk at all; a worship concert is a little different since they are often playing 12+ songs, then they often stop and talk every few songs so they don't wear everyone out. As for smaller bands, I think all of these can still apply! It sounds like you have a full-band with exception to keys/pads. In that case you can use a guitar to play during transitions instead of the keys or pads. Is there a specific point that you feel doesn't apply? I'd be happy to dive deeper into specific ideas on any of these. Thanks for joining the conversation.

Google™ Custom Search

Search



□ □ □

Popular Posts

[The Story Song Suggestions](#)

[Alive by Young & Free](#)

[What If Your Church Couldn't Pay You?](#)

[Song Transitions and Flow](#)

[Creating A Dynamic Worship Set](#)

Recent Posts

[Top New Worship Songs of 2014](#)

[Should I Be Writing Songs For My Church?](#)

[Jesus Loves Me – Chris Tomlin](#)

[How to Handle the Unexpected](#)

[When You're Out of the Picture](#)

New Worship Songs

[Worth It All](#)

[Greater](#)

[Hallelujah, To Saving Grace](#)

[Set Apart](#)

[Hands of Love](#)

[Hands to the Heavens](#)

[Jesus Loves Me](#)

[In Jesus' Name](#)

[Your Great Love](#)

[This I Believe \(The Creed\)](#)

Popular Worship Songs

[Oceans \(Where Feet May Fail\)](#)

[Lord, I Need You](#)

[Cornerstone](#)

[I Surrender](#)

[How Great Is Our God](#)

[10,000 Reasons \(Bless The Lord\)](#)

[This I Believe \(The Creed\)](#)

[Come As You Are](#)

[Shout](#)

[Christ Is Enough](#)

Categories

[Devotions](#)

[Events](#)

[Gear](#)

[Leadership](#)

[Resources](#)

[Songs](#)

[Uncategorized](#)

[What We're Listening To](#)

[Worship Leaders](#)

POPULAR SEARCHES: [Songs](#) | [Worship Leaders](#) | [Blog](#) | [Store](#)

RESOURCES: [Devotions](#) | [Events](#) | [Gear](#)

PARTNERS : [Passion](#) | [Hillsong](#) | [Kingsway](#) | [CCLI](#)

SONGS

WORSHIP LEADERS

VIDEOS

BLOG

STORE

JOIN NOW
