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5 Strategies For Worship Leaders To Connect Songs And Create Flow In A Setlist

By [David Santistevan](#) — 9 Comments

The most important dynamic of your setlist isn't your songs.

It's more about the fire in your heart, the anticipation in showing up, the wide eyed wonder of your gaze, and bringing others along to do the same.



But there's a way to craft your setlist that will distract or engage the room.

When crafting a worship set, you want to frame an experience that will stick with people long after the worship service is over. It's not just about emotional highs, cool music, and happy sing-a-longs.

We're after God's heart, right?

We want to experience His very near, very real presence.



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My constant prayer is that when the congregation leaves, their not so much enraptured by the skill of a band but by the glory of a God like no other.

I want them to bank their hope on the promises of the Word of God which they just finished singing. But we all know there are good songs and bad songs. There are effective worship sets and duds.

While songs aren't paramount, the songs we choose can unlock faith in the room or they can leave people staring.



And it's not just the songs themselves, but how we structure a list of songs. It's how we flow together in worship. And that's what this article is all about. I want to leave you with 5 actionable strategies that you can put to use this very day in your worship planning.

5 Simple Strategies for Connecting Worship Songs

I think many of us look to the songs other churches are doing or we look to the CCLI top 10. But we never stop to consider, what does my church really need? Am I giving them what's trendy or am I serving their voice and native expression of worship?

1. Connect Logical Song Pathways – This is a strategy that has worked really well for me. Rather than trying to find a few isolated songs out of the air, connect the final phrase of your current song with the first phrase of the next. This is a great way for songs to flow in theme and style.

For example, the song "Cornerstone" ends with the phrase "He is Lord, Lord of All" which logically flows into the chorus of "At Your Name" – "Lord of all the earth we shout your name." Or like Chris Tomlin did, "How Great is Our God" flows very logically into "How Great Thou Art."

It's these kind of medleys and song connections that make the truth a little stickier for people. I'm all for the big, isolated song arrangements. But having a "medley moment" in every worship set makes it feel more human and flow more.



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For example, this last weekend we did “Let it Be Known” from Worship Central which is a fairly “shallow” theme theologically but still a fun, powerful declaration. As a “transition” song we sang the old “When I Think About the Lord” which tied in the whole “shout” and “declare” theme from both songs. It wasn’t a full arrangement, just a simple 2 minute transition which helped make the transition smoother (and engaged the **older generation**).

These simple, transition song moments not only encourage congregational singing they also give your band a breather before launching into another full arrangement. Give it a try!

3. Look Backward and Forward – Most of us spend a good bit of time looking for great new songs. We listen to CDs, subscribe to Spotify, download on iTunes. We scour YouTube for the latest Hillsong anthems. But what if we put just as much effort into looking back as we do looking forward? What older songs will unlock special moments for your church?

I think every worship set you plan should have this backward/forward dynamic. Learn to be a student of church history and of your church’s history. Capture the deep, wide story of God in your song choices. Resist the urge to just try and be cool.

Bringing back older songs is a great strategy for bringing connection to your setlist.

4. Teach Your Band to Flow – There are specific ways that your band can learn to connect the songs in your set. We don’t just want teams who know how to play songs. We want teams who are there to pastor the music, engage in worship, and create a sense of flow. Here’s some things to try: if you’re speaking, have your band play behind you to minimize any awkward silence. A light drum groove and lead guitar melody can add a nice effect. Train your band to not “check out” after a song, but to be ready for what’s coming next.



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leaders feel awkward. We're nervous. And what does **nervousness** do? It breeds more nervousness. We don't intentionally think through our transitions and approach them with wishful thinking. But what if you decided to relax into those moments in between songs? What if you didn't rush, didn't strive, didn't over-spiritualize the moment? What if you were yourself? The more I've thought like this, the more I've approached those moments with confidence.

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Would love to hear from you.



How do you create a sense of flow in your worship sets? How do you pastor people along a journey of worship rather than a bunch of isolated songs?



Would love to hear your thoughts in the comments. You can leave a comment by clicking here.

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Kortney Kaiser says

September 24, 2014 at 9:56 am



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All great ideas! I learn so much from your blogs. Thank you!

Another thing I do is sing an ad lib prayer or declaration. I find as we end one song the message will flow into a prayer and as I prepare for the next song the prayer often naturally flows into the next "message", or God puts on my heart to proclaim truth over His people and that is the lead in to the next song. Recently I felt compelled to talk about the lies of worthlessness, loneliness, brokenness, hopelessness, etc. The song following was "How He Loves".

I, also, try to tie at least part of the set into the pastor's message, which helps the flow of the entire service and helps the message stick even more so.

Finally, my team isn't the strongest at transitions, but the use of pads has helped a lot to keep things flowing, even when there is empty space where we are just waiting, or as you mentioned, to fill behind when someone is talking. This simple tool removes most of those uncomfortable transition moments.

Reply



David Santistevan says

September 24, 2014 at 4:01 pm

Kortney, great ideas! I love the ad lib prayers/declarations. Makes the worship time feel more real and conversational. Also, have you heard of <http://padloops.com>? A great tool for churches who may not have keyboard players or good pad sounds.

Reply



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Excellent article! 😊

I'd also add (6) practicing key changes, which may include (7) tweaking the keys of songs so there's an easier musical flow (8) using acapella as a means to slow things down (9) using a repeated chorus to speed things up.

Lastly, I'd add not to be down on yourself when the human factor comes in! During one such medley I moved to the old Cornerstone hymn, but completely the wrong rhythm. God can and does move in the place where we give our best, even if we get it wrong!

Reply



David Santistevan says
September 24, 2014 at 4:02 pm

Dave – excellent ideas. I employ all of these! Ha – that dang human element. Sneaks up all the time 😊

Reply



Althea Carrington says
September 29, 2014 at 9:21 am

Hi David.

Thanks for the entry today. In addition I received a lot out of the 5 simple strategies (makes a lot of sense)

My challenge as a worship leader is that we don't have a full band. We are an established ministry. Recently went through major changes/transitions in our music



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I really would like to see us moving more in spontaneous, prophetic worship but it is difficult. As the Lord allows I try to implement spontaneity.

Any suggestions?

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Reply



Ali says

March 14, 2015 at 12:28 pm

Althea,

My suggestion is for you to pray for musicians! we are having a down time with drummers this month, and we have decided to pray and ask God for what we need. Elevation worship talked about how they gathered enough musicians to host like 9 different campuses or something crazy like that. They prayed all of the in.. The prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective! Also, do you play an instrument? I would encourage you to continue to take lessons to get better at your craft. Excellence breeds excellence.

Reply



Nelly says

November 11, 2014 at 5:26 am

A Blessed Day to you, David ! I praised God for this article because I learned a lot from you and was reminded by the others who commented on it. In our church, what we do to smoothen transitions are:

1. use same key for 2 praise songs and another same for key worship songs, sometimes ,
2. we also use declaration, prayers or reading the Bible,



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Thank you for the opportunity to learn and share. GOD BLESS ALL CHRISTIANS
MUSICIANS.



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May our Great Lord JESUS continue to guide you and give you wisdom in your very
endeavour. TO GOD BE THE GLORY!



Reply



Trackbacks

Building A Worship Set That Flows | Worship Links says:

September 26, 2014 at 5:32 pm

[...] David Santistevan writes: [...]

A Simple Way To Make Your Worship Sets Flow More And Distract Less | David

Santistevan says:

April 21, 2015 at 7:40 am

[...] think we would all agree that our worship sets should sound more natural and connected.
Less like a concert of song to song to song and more of a journey. I talked briefly about this in
[...]

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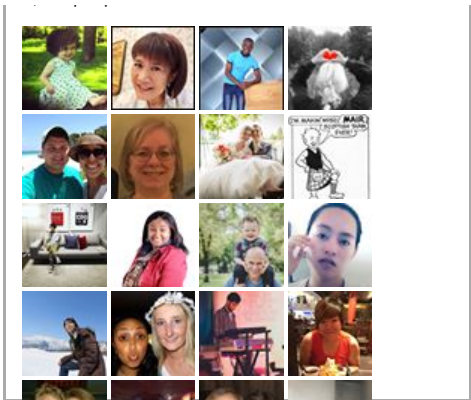
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