

SECOND BAPTIST CHURCH
WORSHIP TASK FORCE
RECOMMENDATIONS

October 5th, 2008



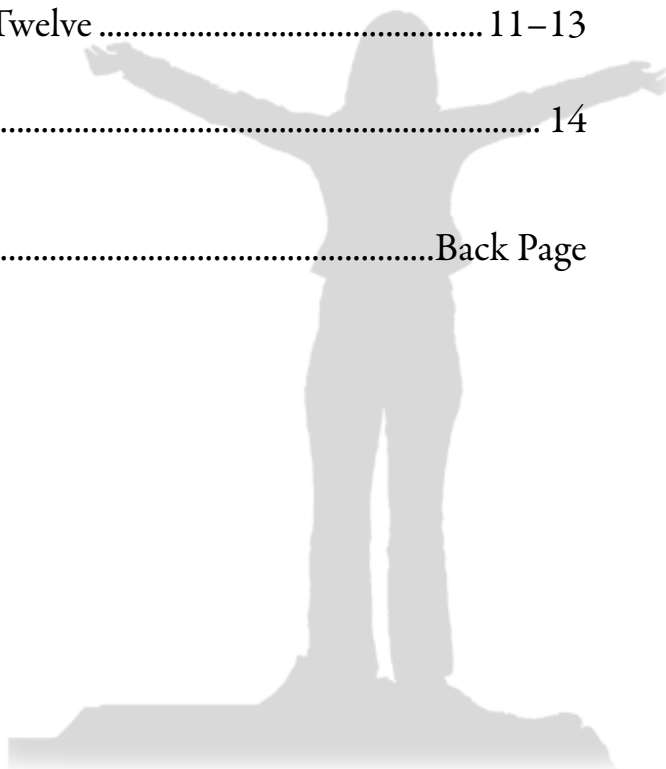
Second
Baptist Church

D O W N T O W N

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PART ONE – DEFINING WORSHIP

In January of this year at the direction of the church body, the Ministry Placement Team nominated a Worship Task Force which was then approved by the church body. The Ministry Placement Team made every effort to select members representative of the church body as a whole. The members are Lori Bowen, Vicki Haydon, Andrea Heflin, Jo Jones, Gayle Maloch, Gavin McCollum, Jon Poteet, Wayne West, and Jeff Whitlow. Suzanne Cain, Matt Cook, and Donna Gosser served as ex officio members of the task force due to their church staff roles as worship planners. The Worship Task Force (WTF) was charged with three tasks .

1. **Define worship**
2. **Evaluate worship at Second Baptist Church**
3. **Make proposals for change if needed**

Being Baptists, we started our search with the Scriptures. Each of our first three meetings began with Bible study. **Isaiah 6:1-8** raised several questions for us and revealed some important truths. What is it like to come into the presence of Almighty God in worship? Do we take God's presence for granted or too lightly? In the presence of God we are reminded that we are dependent upon His mercy and grace. His perfection highlights our imperfection. We are moved to a confession of our sin which allows His forgiveness to cleanse us and make us whole again. Our worship should also move us to do our part in God's mission in the world. "Here am I, send me," cries Isaiah. Our worship shapes and changes our actions and attitudes. We are not the same after our encounter with the living God.

In **John 4:1-26** we see Jesus encountering the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus teaches her and us that the place of worship and style of worship is not what is important to God. He seeks worshippers who worship "*in spirit and truth.*" Spirit is the power and presence of God at work in the world. In worship we seek to connect or reconnect with the presence of God. His presence gives meaning and purpose to our lives, it is life giving. The truth in the Gospel of John is Jesus. "*I am the way, the truth, and the life,*" Jesus says. Worship ought to shape us more in the image of Jesus.

The Psalms give us the most insight into Israel's worship. We particularly recommend a close look at **Psalms 95-100**. Take note of the verbs used. They are active and encompass a wide variety of actions. Worship in the Psalms is not a spectator sport. Soren Kierkegaard, Danish theologian and philosopher captures this well. In worship we normally see ourselves as the audience. The worship leaders on the platform are the performers and worship depends upon the quality of their performance. When asked how worship was on a given day we usually respond by commenting on the sermon, the musical selections and how well they were presented, or perhaps something else that happened on the platform. The truth according to Kierkegaard is that we are the actors, the worship leaders function as directors, and God alone is the audience. "An Audience of One" became the theme for our eight week series on worship.

In this process the WTF included some outside reading. In the beginning we divided into three groups for the reading. One group read *Worship Evangelism* by Sally Morgenthaler. Her book helped



us to see that those outside the church are hungry for authentic worship, to encounter God. Due to the fact that we live in a culture that values entertainment, our worship often reflects the entertainment mentality. The temptation is to do whatever will get people in the door. Her contention is that while this may work for a while people will soon get turned off if there is no authenticity or depth to the worship.

Another group took a look at *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* by Marva J. Dawn. One of the important insights from her book is the way our culture impacts our worship. We live in a time when we are bombarded with information from a wide variety of sources. We simply cannot respond to all the information we receive so we become conditioned to receive information and not do anything with it. In worship we expect people to have their lives changed by what they hear, see, and experience. True worship always produces results and makes an impact on the world.

A third group read *The Voice of the Congregation* by Terry York and David Bolin. The main emphasis of this book was that every congregation is called to live out its own distinctive approach to worship. Worship should be a reflection of who God has called together in that congregation, rather than trying to imitate what other churches do. Each church, then, has its own unique voice that it uses to fully worship God.

Together we read *Unceasing Worship* by Harold M. Best. In his book he raises several points. One is that worship needs to be a lifestyle, more than just something we do on Sunday mornings. Worship becomes a part of our lives on a daily basis as we connect with the continuing presence of God. In our times of corporate worship when we leave feeling “*unsatisfied*,” the problem may be that we came to the worship service unprepared to seek God’s presence. We tend to place the responsibility for our worship outside ourselves. The responsibility must be focused on the inside, on the presence of Christ in us.

Our final book was *Beyond the Worship Wars* by Thomas C. Long. His point was that too much time and effort had been spent in churches fighting over style. There are good things to be taken from all styles of worship. Our God is too small if we think He can be worshipped in only one way. The task of the congregation is to find a format for worship that encourages and celebrates the participation of the whole of the body. Each body of believers will find a way that is unique, there is no “*one size fits all*” approach when it comes to worship.

After these months of reading, study, and discussion, the time came to put on paper our definition of worship for Second Baptist. At one point we had over twenty suggested possibilities. Here it is. **Worship is our authentic and unceasing response to God’s presence. We offer all we are as living sacrifices to God, revealed in Jesus Christ.** It is our consensus that this embodies the best of what we gleaned from our Bible study, our prayers, our discussion, and the leading of God’s Spirit. We hope that it puts the focus of worship on God and calls us to an active, life changing, world changing response.



PART TWO - EVALUATING WORSHIP AT SECOND BAPTIST CHURCH

At this point we were now ready to begin the second task we were assigned. The WTF wanted to find a way to get feedback from as many of our congregation as possible. The idea was suggested to have meetings on a Sunday morning and combine classes from different age groups so that a member of the WTF could be present at each one to listen and report back to the larger group. We believed that the best tool for evaluating our current worship would be to determine what values should, and which values currently do shape our worship. We also encouraged those who could not attend the Sunday morning meetings to contact us in writing. The meetings proved to be most helpful as we received a great deal of feedback. At the end of this process we had a list of over thirty values that were mentioned.

After much prayer, discussions, and soul-searching, the WTF narrowed the list to seven values that captured the predominant ideas expressed in scripture, and by the vast majority of our members. The final list is as follows:

- **God-focused**
- **Authenticity/Humility**
- **Participatory**
- **Transformational**
- **Deep/Biblical**
- **Unity/Diversity**
- **Still/Reflective**

Once we completed this process, we turned our attention to comparing our stated values (*at least as the WTF interprets them*) to the way we currently worship as a congregation. We believed that the best interests of our church would be served by an honest and comprehensive examination of the ways in which we attempt to live up to what we say is important to us in worship. Here's how we evaluated ourselves:

The values in which we are strongest are participatory and deep/biblical. We felt that worship at 2BC tends to provide multiple opportunities for active participation, and that as a congregation we are not only accustomed to, but also energized by going deeper in our examination of scripture and theology, and how to apply them.

A second set of values that we embrace, but perhaps need some further attention are the values of **unity in diversity, still/reflective, and transformational.** We celebrate our diversity as a congregation, but it is also fair to say that such diversity creates challenges in worship. Greater attention has been given to stillness and reflection in our church in recent years which we celebrate, but there is still much room for growth in a world that makes these values so hard to live out. Finally, we want to challenge ourselves to continue to allow our experience of God in worship to shape each of us in the image of Jesus Christ. Worship has impacted each of us occasionally, but there is a need to be reminded that worship should transform all of us consistently.

Our two lowest values, at least in terms of how we believe we are currently practicing them, are **authenticity/humility and God-focused.** There is a great temptation in any faith community for individuals to wear masks, pretending as if everything is okay. The WTF strongly believes (*and your feedback*



also indicates) that our failure to be real with God and each other carries great spiritual consequences. Worship must be a place where we all acknowledge openly that we are sinners in need of grace.

The key to understanding this entire report, and our focus on worship as a congregation, can be found in the value of being God-focused. Second Baptist Church has and continues to be a church that gives glory to God in a variety of ways. We also acknowledge, however, that in our church, as in many others, worship has been evaluated far too often on matters of style and individual preference. The central question, however, is not our preferences but whether or not God is pleased by our worship. Is God pleased with our sacrifices of time, attention, money, and, yes, even our personal preferences? We will never fully achieve this value, but we must not ever fail to try and live it out.

After completing this evaluation, the WTF then turned its attention to the third task with which we were charged, offering concrete proposals for how we might change the way we worship as a congregation. These proposals are listed in Part Three below.

PART THREE – PROPOSALS & FOOTNOTES

The following proposals represent specific changes suggested by the WTF concerning the way Second Baptist Church worships together as a congregation. When we reached the third phase of our work (*making concrete suggestions to the congregation concerning specific changes we should make*), the WTF consistently sought to achieve consensus on each proposal we would be submitting to the congregation. As a result, the WTF chose, in several cases, not to present proposals where consensus (*or at least a very strong majority*) could not be achieved. Our intent in taking this approach was only to make recommendations that seemed to be grounded in the discernible leading of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, in discussing how these proposals should be acted upon by the congregation, the WTF has also taken the liberty of grouping the proposals into four separate sections. The first three sections consist of only one proposal each (*Proposals 1-3*). After lengthy discussion, the WTF believes that these first three proposals are of such significance that they should be discussed and voted upon individually.

Following these first three individual proposals, a list of the remaining proposals is offered and are grouped together into a fourth section. Though the WTF anticipates that this list will generate less conversation and debate, each action request was thoroughly discussed, and each comes with our strong endorsement.

Each proposal will be stated first as a request for a specific action, followed by a brief explanation for the change being suggested.

Following the list of proposals comes a number of “footnotes” to the final report. These notes represent significant discussion on the part of the WTF but without any accompanying action requests.



Proposal 1

ACTION REQUEST—Second Baptist Church should adopt the following seven values (*and the accompanying definitions*) as a guide for our times of corporate worship. These values should, over time, be consistently embodied in the way that we worship together.

EXPLANATION—As noted in Part Two, these values emerged from feedback provided by the congregation about worship. These values reflect a biblical understanding of worship, and also distinctive aspects of Second Baptist Church. The WTF is not anticipating (*nor recommending*) a slavish adherence to these values in the form of a weekly checklist. Instead, as we worship together as a congregation over time, our hope is that these values will not only shape our times of worship, but also each individual worshipper.

SECOND BAPTIST WORSHIP VALUES & DEFINITIONS

GOD-FOCUSED—The audience for worship is God alone.

AUTHENTICITY/HUMILITY—Worship is confession of sin and expressions of joys and sorrows, and acknowledging the gift of God’s mercy and grace.

PARTICIPATORY—Worship is a sacrificial personal offering by all believers to our expectant Father.

TRANSFORMATIONAL—Worship leads us to honest self-reflection and God-inspired action.

UNITY/DIVERSITY—Worship is a rich diversity of heartfelt responses that draw all believers to unity in Christ with the purpose of glorifying God.

DEEP/BIBLICAL—Worship is faithful to the joyful, difficult and complex revelations of God through scripture and the Holy Spirit.

STILL/REFLECTIVE—Worship is a sacred time, set apart to hear God’s voice.



Proposal 2

ACTION REQUEST—Second Baptist Church should move from conducting two separate worship services on Sunday morning, to holding one service following Bible study beginning no later than November 30th, 2008.

EXPLANATION—For roughly 10 years, Second Baptist Church has held two worship services (*one more traditional, one more contemporary*) on Sunday morning. Originally, a second more contemporary service was added with the hopes that it would serve to draw more people to our church. In some ways, this hope was realized. Over the past decade a number of people joined our body in part because of the exuberance and freedom that they felt in the *Bridge*. We celebrate these additions greatly for the vitality that these individuals have brought to our body, just as we also celebrate those who have joined us through the first service. Just as much as we celebrate these additions, we also celebrate what God has taught us about worship in both of these services. As a task force, we firmly believe that God's hand was in the decision made ten years ago.

And yet, just as we celebrate that decision, we sense that God is preparing our church to learn a new lesson about worship in the coming years. Our hope and prayer is that the lessons that God has taught us in two services for the past decade can be brought together in a beautiful whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. We believe that worship at Second Baptist will be bolstered, not diminished, by gathering the collective strengths of the entire congregation of worshippers together in one room on Sunday morning.

We also believe that one service is the best use of our resources as a congregation. No church can be all things to all people, and any attempt to be so in worship, leads easily to putting our desires before God's. Ten years ago, it was our hope that offering multiple worship styles would enable us to connect with people outside our body. Recent trends indicate, however, that worship style is having less and less impact on drawing people to churches. This is especially true of non-Christians.

Instead, we have come to believe that one of the best "testimonies" we can offer to people new to our community of faith is a passionate and enthusiastic unity of the entire congregation in worship, focused together on praising God and being changed by our encounter with Him. By putting the focus first on God, we believe that seekers will experience our passion for God and be drawn into worshipping themselves.



Proposal 3

ACTION REQUEST—In order to allow for and promote greater participation by everyone in worship at Second Baptist Church, greater emphasis should be placed upon unity in participatory elements, while allowing for creative diversity in other aspects of worship.

EXPLANATION—In some ways, proposal three is simply an extension of the WTF’s common belief that Second Baptist will be better served by one worship service rather than two. Rather than focusing on trying to make everyone happy by occasionally singing the kind of music they like to sing (*and occasionally unhappy by not singing that same music*), we believe that our congregation will be better served by finding common elements that allow for the broadest level participation each and every Sunday.

Again, we cannot be all things to all people, nor should we try. The Kingdom of God is bigger than Second Baptist Church and so God is blessed each and every Sunday by countless congregations worshipping in overwhelming diversity.

In a sense, what the WTF is proposing is that Second Baptist Church develops its own unique “voice” in worship by finding elements that help all of us, together, lift our hearts to God. One of the interesting discoveries made by the WTF in reading deeply about worship is that vitality in worship is typically found in congregations that celebrate and embody their own uniqueness.

In the case of Second Baptist Church, it should be noted that our “voice” may, because of our great diversity, be more eclectic than some other congregations. Indeed, it is not the purpose of this proposal to stymie creativity. Worship at Second Baptist Church can and should include contributions from the breadth of the body encompassing (*as much as is reasonably possible*) all our gifts. Furthermore, each human being encounters God differently, so a variety of worship methods (*such as video, scripture reading, testimonies, dance, times of silence to name but a few*) is appropriate.

But in each service there will be moments when the emphasis should be upon our unity as a congregation, as we collectively worship God. In such moments, it is the belief of the WTF that our congregation will be better served by emphasizing the goal of a unity of participation rather than a diversity of styles.

Proposals 4—12

4. **ACTION REQUEST**—The Worship Planning Team should find ways to consistently guide the congregation toward keeping the focus of worship upon God.

EXPLANATION—Because it is very easy to lose sight of the fact that God is the audience in worship, the Worship Planning team should find ways to replicate and reinforce our recent emphasis on worship in an ongoing fashion. We do not expect that this would necessarily take the form of a multi-week emphasis (*such as it has transpired in the Fall of 2008*), but mainly on a smaller scale, both consistently and creatively.

5. **ACTION REQUEST**—The Brooks Hays Award Service is one of our best opportunities, in the context of a Sunday worship setting, to give our membership and our community real-life examples of what following God and Christian citizenship looks like from the example of people who have exhibited



discipleship in a variety of fields through different types of real challenges. And since the Brooks Hays Award Service, with the proper focus locked in, has the potential to furnish our congregation with a Sunday worship experience that can reflect all the core worship values while educating our community of believers on the core principles of Christian discipleship on which our church's rich heritage is based, we recommend the Christian Life Service Team to work carefully and closely with the pastor, the worship planning team and other appropriate parties to ensure that the service puts the primary focus on God and His work through the lives of individuals and remains consistent with the previously outlined core worship values.

EXPLANATION—We often see Christ most clearly in the lives of fellow believers. Observing the courageous discipleship of one who walks among us often acts as a catalyst for us, challenging us... “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with (our) God.” Micah 6:9.

6. ACTION REQUEST—Worship at Second Baptist Church should regularly include participatory elements that help us demonstrate and develop authenticity and humility.

EXPLANATION—Openly and honestly acknowledging who we are before God is among our most important tasks in worship. In order to embody the values authenticity and humility, we need to act them out in ways such as kneeling, testimonies, and times of corporate confession.

7. ACTION REQUEST—Second Baptist Church should take the Lord's Supper together more often.

EXPLANATION—Nearly all of the values the WTF heard strongly expressed by the congregation (*during our discussion of worship values in the Spring of 2008*) are strongly reflected in the practice of taking the Lord's Supper. As a practice in worship, the Lord's Supper is a highly participatory act that heightens our sense of humility, calls us to personal transformation, and binds us together as a community. For these reasons, the WTF recommends that our congregation takes the Lord's Supper together approximately once a month.

8. ACTION REQUEST—Worship at Second Baptist Church should, as much as possible, continue to be led by a broad variety of worship leaders that encompasses the breadth of our congregation.

EXPLANATION—The WTF enthusiastically approves of the efforts of the Worship Planning Team to include as many people as possible in a variety of roles in worship including prayer, scripture, musical offerings, and other artistic expressions. Leading in worship should not just be a role relegated to a select few but should provide opportunity for many to lead from across the spectrum of our church (*including children, teen-agers, and all adult groups*).

9. ACTION REQUEST—Worship at Second Baptist should consistently include elements that encourage active participation in worship beyond congregational singing.

EXPLANATION—Congregational singing has been a consistent way for everyone to participate in worship. Other worship elements exist, however, in addition to singing that allow for/encourage active



participation. Worship at Second Baptist, then, should regularly include elements such as responsive readings, corporate prayer, and videos that gather responses from a broad number of participants.

10. ACTION REQUEST—Second Baptist Church should continue the occasional practice of focusing on the same theme in Bible study and worship.

EXPLANATION—Part of the distinctive character of our church is that we value the life of the mind in our church. Deeply examining scripture and theology is part of who we are. “Stacking” our Bible study and worship themes periodically, enables us to go deeper into important subjects.

11. ACTION REQUEST—Worship at Second Baptist Church should occasionally incorporate the element of silence.

EXPLANATION—We live in a society that is over-scheduled and over-stimulated. All of this noise and motion is having a negative spiritual impact on our ability to hear the still, small voice of God. Worship, then, should cultivate a listening spirit in us, and silence is one of the most significant conditions for allowing us to develop such a spirit.

12. ACTION REQUEST—The WTF (*or some other duly designated body*) should work alongside the Worship Planning Team for the period of one year in order to provide feedback for the implementation of any proposals adopted by the congregation.

EXPLANATION—Many of the proposals offered in this report have yet to be fully fleshed out, as is appropriate given the fact the congregation has yet to consider/adopt them. In order to provide accountability and support to the Worship Planning Team during any such implementation, a group that represents the full diversity of our body needs to work alongside them, to consider certain issues and, perhaps, in some cases, to, forward them on to the congregation for approval.



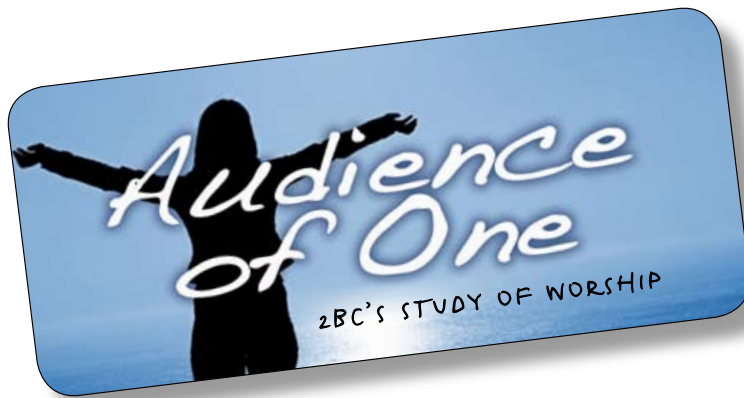
FOOTNOTES

1. ***On Recognizing Individuals in Worship***—Lengthy discussion took place concerning if and how it is appropriate to recognize or praise anyone other than God in worship. The question in such cases is intent. Is our intent to give glory to God by recognizing how someone has been faithful or simply to praise the individual? There is a fine line between the two, and so we need to pay attention to such issues in worship.

2. ***On the Use of Invitations***—Many Baptist churches continue to extend traditional invitations in which great emphasis is placed by the pastor on becoming a Christian or joining the church. Changes in our culture, however, have undermined the effectiveness of traditional invitations in worship. Churches can no longer assume that non-Christians have an appreciation for (*or even an understanding of*) such methods. Indeed, the people most likely to respond to traditional invitations are those who see the pastor as an authority figure worth heeding. As our culture begins to see greater numbers of people without any church background, the church cannot and should not assume that non-members see pastors in this way. This does NOT mean that invitations should not take place. What it DOES mean is that “invitations” will probably need to be extended by the entire congregation as each of us talk about our own relationships with God with our non-Christian friends (*as well as Christians who may be currently disconnected from a church*). The bottom line is that “invitations” are not less important in our church at this point in our history, they are just taking a different form that sometimes (*though not always*) happen in places outside of worship.

3. ***On Our Current Practice of Creating Consistent Time for Reflection in Worship***—In recent years, worship at Second Baptist has begun to include consistent times for quiet and reflection in each service. At the beginning of each service, we set aside time to “Prepare Our Hearts” and following the sermon we are given time for “Reflection” before being asked to respond. The WTF felt that it was appropriate to strongly endorse the use of such practices as these as part of our overall evaluation of the way worship is currently conducted in our church.

4. ***On the Use of Sacred Beauty/Symbolism in Worship***—The Worship Task Force believes that Second Baptist should consider investing time and resources in the task of introducing and utilizing beauty and sacred symbols in worship. We believe adding these elements would create a sense of sacred space that would encourage our awareness of God’s presence.



**1. Task Force
Recommendations**

Sunday, October 5th

**2. Question & Answer
Sessions**

Wednesday, October 8th, 5:00—5:45PM

(Childcare provided)

Wednesday, October 15th, 5:45—6:30PM

Churchwide Town Hall

Sunday, October 26th, 5:30PM

**3. Church Vote
Fall Family Gathering**

Sunday, November 2nd, 5:30—8:00PM

All meetings will be held in the Fellowship Hall.