

The Sunday Gathering



A Guide to Serving
at Village Church

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Dear: Village Church,

The Sunday gathering at Village Church is a celebration of the life of our church family, the focal point of our Bible teaching ministry, and an “open door” to the wider community. We don’t gather together merely to encourage one another – although we do – but to worship our great God together as one body with many members who are unified by one thing: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We really do believe that when we’re gathered together, Christ really is present with us through his Holy Spirit!

And even though Australian culture is always shifting and changing, the Sunday gathering still provides one of the primary and most accessible ways for non-religious people to experience Christian community and be invited into what God is doing in our city through his Son, Jesus. So alongside everything we do at Village in our pursuit of growing followers of Jesus, we want to work hard to create Sunday gatherings that are exciting, accessible, and enjoyable – holding out the life-giving gospel to a world that desperately needs it.

Our Sunday gatherings are shaped by a number of key biblical truths along with some tried and tested bits of practical wisdom. These are outlined in the following pages. As best we can we’ve tried to clarify our “theology of worship,” that is, what we believe happens when we gather together to worship God. You can find this under the “What we Think” section. This is followed by what could be called our “Philosophy of Ministry,” or how our biblical convictions shape “the vibe” of Village Church given our particular time, space, and location. You can find this under the “What we Feel” section. Finally, “What we Do” is an attempt to lay out our ministry practices in the life of the Sunday gathering. This is where we really get into the nuts and bolts of our Sunday Serving Guide.

If you’ve been around Village for a while now you know that our community – along with the ministry staff – seek to be highly relational in all we do as we walk alongside one another with all gentleness, love, and generosity. So while the Sunday Serving Guide



might seem overly specific at points, please remember that we're merely trying to capture the "ideal" feel of a service based on 10 years of reflection, trial and error, but also positive outcomes that we've seen in the life of our church. And believe us when we say that all of the "dos and don'ts" that pop up in the Serving Guide are only there because we as a staff team have "done" all the "don'ts" ... and regretted them miserably! So while we want to do our best to serve our wider community and faithfully steward the gifts, talents, and people God has given us at Village, we're not striving for perfection – so please never use this Guide to shame or berate yourself or fellow Villagers!

Over the years, God has been very kind in using Village Church to produce good fruit — many people can testify that they have come to faith and have grown as followers of Jesus as a result of your labour. We know that it really does take a Village to raise up new believers and to push one another to grow in our faith. We don't take your work lightly! Whoever you are – whether you've been with us since the start or have just joined us yesterday – we are all co-labourers together in the gospel. Thank you. From the bottom of our hearts we want to thank you for your willingness to be involved in the public ministries of Village. Your tireless, servant-hearted desire to pour yourselves out for the sake of one another has created a community that has always been an absolute joy and privilege to lead. If you think there are any ways we can improve our Sunday gatherings, please let us know.

Ever yours in Christ,
The Village Team

WHAT WE THINK

Introduction

Christian worship is a lot like love. Everybody "knows" what worship is just as everybody "knows" what love is. And yet, the harder you try to come up with a definition for worship – just as a definition for love – the harder the task becomes. Nevertheless, Scripture is not silent on what happens when God's people gather together weekly to worship him and serve one another. It's therefore our joy to work out these timeless truths in a way that makes sense of the context we find ourselves in at Village Church.

So while there may be infinite ways to describe a "theology of worship," at Village Church we've focused on four core truths that are central to our beliefs and ministry practice in the life of our Sunday gatherings. What are those four biblical truths? At Village Church, we believe that when God's people gather together, our Christian worship will inherently be evangelical, congregational, transformational, and missional. So before we continue on to our Sunday Serving Guide, let's quickly unpack the biblical foundations that sit behind our convictions.

a) Christian Worship will be Evangelical

As we gather in worship, every point of our service will be both a declaration and a demonstration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Not only is Jesus explicitly worshiped as God in the New Testament but many of the Old Testament patterns of worship – including the location of worship itself – finds its fulfilment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, while we can rightly say that all true worship is God-centred, Christian worship must be no less *Christ*-centred.

For example, immediately following his resurrection, Jesus visits two of his disciples, and "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets [a short-hand way of speaking of the Old Testament Scriptures], he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the

Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). This became Paul's own *modus operandi* when he says, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). Therefore, the heart of Christian worship will always be the good news of God's grace in Christ toward us sinners (Eph. 2:4-5).

Our aim then is to *demonstrate* the gospel through our unity in diversity, through the way we love one another, and through the pattern of godly living. But our gatherings are also a *declaration* of the gospel where we gather together to declare one thing: that in Jesus, we have all that we need.

b) Christian Worship will be Congregational

As we gather in worship, we reflect the simple truth that God does not save us to individuality but into a community of his people.

In one sense, the book of Revelation is one giant reflection on the end-goal of our Christian worship. And there we see that worship serves the function of uniting us with "all the saints," both past, present, and future (e.g. Rev. 5:8; 8:4). So too our worship today finds its place "in the middle" of a throng representing people from every tribe, nation, and tongue (e.g. Gal. 3:28).

It is this community of God's people that the New Testament writers so often stressed as the context of our Christian worship. For example, Paul urges the Christians in Rome to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom. 12:1). This "true worship" – as Paul calls it – is then expressed in the way each member of Christ's body exercises their gifts within the church (Rom. 12:6-8). Indeed, it is within the body of Christ, as we gather together, that God has given us everything we need to grow and become equipped as his people (Eph. 4:11-13).

Our aim then is to capture this community aspect of worship in our Sunday gatherings by including a wide variety of the congregation in our formal service. We also want to

provide plenty of space for people to respond to the sermon – whether by publicly asking questions, or encouraging one another through their own reflections – during Q&A time following the sermon. This we hope is an expression that God’s word is the highest authority of our community and that Christian maturity happens best in relation to one another, not in isolation.

c) Christian Worship will be Transformational

As we gather in worship, we expect to be changed by the Holy Spirit as God reshapes us into the image of his Son.

That is, we believe the human heart is changeable and it’s ultimately shaped by what it loves. What we do in pursuit of what we love can rightly be called "rituals" or the more "churchy" term: liturgy. Believe it or not, Village Church has a strong liturgy! We believe that how we order the Sunday service matters, and that each part of our gathered worship aids in reshaping our hearts and renewing our minds as Christ’s Spirit brings his word to bear on our lives.

For example, if you read through Colossians 3 you’ll notice how for Paul, "clothing ourselves in Christ’s love" (which is a way of saying we become more Christ-like) happens in the context of the weekly worship service: it is as the Bible is opened up and God’s people sing praises to him that we are being transformed into the image of Christ (Col. 3:12–17). Likewise, when Paul writes to the Roman Christians, he commands them not to be conformed to this world but to "be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). In fact, it is the appearance of God’s grace that instructs us on how to live, having been redeemed by Jesus, eager to do good works (Titus 2:11-14).

Our aim then is to create worship services that are both *confessional* and *formative*. That is, we will confess to God what we are: broken sinners in need of his grace. But we will also say to God what we aspire to be: people who are being transformed into the image of his Son through his Holy Spirit. In other words, how we structure our Sunday gatherings

is important in that they provide the key moment to our *counterformation*: becoming less like the world and more like Jesus.

d) Christian Worship will be Missional

As we gather in worship, we do not want to be self-absorbed but "other-centred;" being salt and light to the world.

Jesus is the great Missionary, sent by the Father. He comes to gather his people and to call gatherers – disciples who will gather with him. If our worship does not gather others then Jesus says we are scatterers (Mt. 12:30). In John 17:20-21 Jesus says that the quality and visibility of Christians' love for each other will show the world that the Father has sent him. As he was about to ascend into heaven, Jesus charged all his followers to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Mat. 28:19). When Paul writes to the Corinthians, he says that what we do in our worship services ought to promote God to those around us such that an outsider might fall on their face, worship God, and declare that God really is among his people (1 Cor. 14:23-25).

Our aim then is to create Sunday gatherings that not only issue in love to others but is at every point accessible to the outsider. In other words, we want our services to be understandable and comfortable for all who come, being culturally sensitive so as to challenge and offend only where God does as we invite others to taste and see the new community God is building in Jesus.

In our next section we'll expand on this last idea as we start to think through the shape of our Sunday gathering and how we reckon the service ought to feel when we gather together.

WHAT WE FEEL

It's important to understand that while our theology of Christian worship is grounded in biblical truth, each local gathering will express this differently because of its members and its mission – Village Church is no different, and that's OK! Of course we want to reach everyone but the reality is that people are drawn to different things at different times. Therefore, any attempt to shape the "style" of our church gatherings will seem subjective – because they are subjective. We're not arguing it has to look like this in every church, nor that there is no room to improve and grow at Village Church. Rather, what follows is simply an expression of who we think we are and who we're trying to reach, given the biblical parameters we feel we should work within.

Now, it's not easy documenting a feeling, or what we might call "the vibe" of our Sunday gatherings. It's more something you experience. Yet Village Church certainly has a vibe; one that we're keen to hold on to. But in order to do that we need to attempt to express what produces it.

As mentioned, at the heart of our aim for our Sunday gatherings is that we want them to be accessible. We don't want anyone who comes to Village Church to feel on the outer – whether they identify as Christian or not. This isn't about pitching to the lowest common denominator, nor is it necessarily the explanation of everything we do at all times – although this is sometimes appropriate.

Rather, it's about behaving and leading in such a way that we reflect the gospel, make the gospel clear, and never offend or alienate where the gospel does not. So while there will be elements of our Sunday gathering that will feel odd to those who don't go to church, we want to work hard to make the cultural shift as easy as possible from the outside world into our Sunday gathering.

Therefore, what follows are four over-arching principles that express our desire to be accessible in our Sunday gatherings. When in doubt, ask yourself if what you're doing on any given Sunday reflects these ideals. Sundays at Village Church will be:

Warm and Welcoming. That is, every Sunday we want to be great hosts to our wider community. There are two ways this plays out. First, we want to work hard in the way we think through not only the "place" we meet but the "space" we meet in as well as this communicates something of what we value and what we think of others. On the one hand, we want our space to feel personable and "lived in" but on the other hand, we don't want excessive mess and clutter to be the first thing people see as they walk in or up the front in the lecture theatre. It's distracting and doesn't communicate our desire to be a hospitable space where people feel invited, can find their way around, and can ultimately feel like this is a space where they can belong. Secondly, we want to be good hosts in the way we interact with new comers. That is, not as "projects" or people to be signed up to rosters, but guests who first and foremost sense we love and value them for who they are – not what we can get from them. Our main goal as we approach new comers should be to form an organic point of connection so that they feel an emotional and relational reason for coming back.

Informal but not Irreverent. That is, we want to take God seriously while not taking ourselves too seriously. This is not to be confused with irreverence, nor is it to be confused with self-deprecation – both Australian traits. Yet it takes both those traits and turns them to the positive. In other words, we allow God to be the hero of the story, while acknowledging that he works good things through broken and sometimes clumsy people. Our meetings are not performances but neither are they merely Christian hang-outs; they're significant moments where Christ really is present with us as we gather to honour and glorify God. So as we embrace our God-given personalities as well as the freedom and diversity we have in Christ, our desire is to present the truth of the gospel with integrity, clarity,

seriousness, humour, vulnerability, openness and conviction – in an informal, yet reverent way.

Conversational and Personal. In their audience engagement, some churches opt for a “grand” style of speech that fits well with more traditional liturgy. This style is entirely appropriate in some settings and at certain points. But the tone we’re aiming for at Village Church would best be described as *conversational* – a mix of “plain” or “middle” speech – depending on the personality of the person speaking. It’s a mode of speech that walks alongside people in discovery rather than being declarative; a mode of speech that rather than being pronounced from on high is spoken as one equal to another. While we certainly want people to see the passion of what we believe, in the end it’s more important that they grasp *why* we believe not *how* we express that belief.

Nuanced and Humble. There are some things the Bible is very clear on – who God is, how we get right with him, and the unique role of Jesus in reconciling us to God. Yet we live in a broken world amongst a complex, pluralistic society. Even though on any given Sunday we’re surrounded by a majority of people who agree with our point of view, we want to work hard at speaking and presenting the gospel in such a way that empathises with others – working hard to understand their point of view, never arguing them simplistically, all the while presenting the gospel alternative with grace and humility.

WHAT WE DO

We're now at a place where we can set out our Sunday Serving Guide. If you've skipped the rest of this booklet and have come straight here, we recommend you read the "What we Feel" section to help provide some background to the "why" of how we serve.

Below is a breakdown of each movement in our Order of Service with an explanation of its purpose. When applicable, some parameters by role are laid out in order to maintain and implement the vibe at Village Church. Again, this is a guideline – tips and tricks we've picked up along the way – and not a hard and fast document by which to condemn yourself or others! Please speak to us if you have any questions or concerns or ideas from what follows.

General Comments for All

Be yourself. You're not being called to be anyone else.

It's not a performance. We want to be prepared, but if something goes wrong, just go with it!

Avoid sermonettes. That is, little baby sermons or musings that you slip in throughout the service. They can happen at anytime, by anyone with a microphone, and can be distracting and confusing for the audience, or simply drag out moments that don't need to be dragged out. This is an art, not a science, so where applicable we've given some examples on how to avoid them as best we can.

Call to Worship (MC or Music Leader)

A call to worship is basically just a fancy term for saying "welcome" and inviting others to join with us in singing. But think of it this way: most of us come to church weighed down by our sin or distracted by the many pressures of the week. We need help when it comes to setting our minds on God, quieting our hearts in

Christ and living in step with the Spirit. So as we gather to worship, we want to call one another to this through an informal but deliberate Call to Worship.

First: Use the Bible, make it short, and don't feel the need to explain the passage. Pick one or two verses that you can read and give a one or two sentence connection to the song you're about to sing. This is especially helpful if the verses / connection are from the passage that we'll be exploring in the talk.

Second: Keep the monologues to no longer than 20-30 seconds. That doesn't seem like a long time, but when people are standing up waiting to sing it'll feel much longer.

Third: We want this to be personal and reflective – inviting the listener to lay their burdens at the feet of Christ and to focus their heart and mind on him. So be personal, but not didactic. Phrase things like "It's good to be reminded that...to help us reflect on what we're about to sing..." rather than "In today's talk we are going to learn...".

It's always a bit of an art form working out how to initially get people's attention at the start of the service. You might want to start with a crisp and clear welcome and invitation to stand, or you might want to start by getting the band to begin softly playing to get people's attention before the call to worship – that's up to you and what you feel works best for the service you're leading.

Music Leaders

We want our singing to reflect the emotional and tonal breadth of the Bible. This means that sometimes our songs will be quiet and reflective while others will be loud and celebratory; some songs will use more words and be theologically rich while other songs will help give us the space and vocabulary to express our hearts to God. But because everything we do is inherently evangelical, our gathered

singing will both praise God for – and remind one another of – the gospel truths we believe.

We're facilitators, not performers or manipulators. That is, our role is not to perform the songs and hope others join in, but to facilitate the gathered singing of God's people which both praises God and reminds each other of the truths we believe. Music provides an emotional connection to the truth, but it is not our role to lead people into an emotional experience nor to attempt to produce it.

At the same time, what we're singing about is really good news! We want to be excited and celebrate the truths we believe in and give the congregation the freedom to express their singing in a way that makes sense of their personality. When appropriate, smiling, good eye contact with the congregation, clapping, raised hands, etc are all acceptable if it helps the congregation engage in worshiping God. Again, this will be determined by the personality of the person leading, but we want our tone and expression to match the good news we're proclaiming.

Working out transitions is really important. Transitions between songs provide the biggest temptation for sermonettes – don't give in to the temptation! It's distracting, takes the focus off of worshiping God and on to the person talking, and drags out moments that don't need to be dragged out. This one is really important, so here are a few suggestions.

Silence and Segues. While our leading is not a performance, we want to serve the people who we're leading by not letting them stand in awkward silence or monologues in between songs while we get ready to sing the next song. As a general rule, it's helpful to practice how you will transition between songs so that by the time you start the first bracket of singing until you finish there are as few "seams" as possible. This means no

stopping to talk, reflect, or pray in between the singing, and if the band arrangement allows for it, no drawn-out silences as you get ready for the next song.

Transitioning out of the singing. The segue from the first bracket of singing into the rest of the service is important, too. Again this is up to the style of the music leader and MC, but a helpful way to do this is as the final song is closing the music leader or MC leads the congregation in a reflective prayer, being mindful that God may have been using the singing time to work in people's hearts or help them emotionally connect with him – so be gentle, and take your time with it.

MC (Service Leader)

The role of the MC is one of the biggest jobs on Sunday. It's their role to not only help shape but also guide the service along to ensure that the details and space between the different parts of the Order of Service transition naturally. Moreover, they're one of the biggest tone-setters in the whole service, so what they communicate and how they communicate it is really important. Since we want our services to be accessible to the outsider, the MC should have a light, relational touch while taking seriously their role in leading God's people in worship. The main task of the MC will be to welcome people (particularly newcomers), introduce the topic of the talk through a personal story, and share the announcements. The role of the MC at the end will be to close the service by reflecting on one thing that challenged or encouraged them in the talk.

The MC is in charge of implementing the "flow" of the service. They need to chat to the musicians about who will initially welcome and call people to worship, who will pray after the first bracket of songs, when and how to deliver the announcements, and any other details around the "seams" between the different parts of the service.

Musician to MC handover. It generally works best for the music leader to finish the set with prayer and then ask the congregation to sit down. This allows the MC time to come up and get straight into welcoming people and introducing the service. But as the MC, it's your decision how you decide to implement this handover, you'll just need to talk to the music leader.

Your intro should be 3 minutes maximum. There'll be two major elements to this. Welcoming people (particularly newcomers) and introducing the topic and what we'll be looking at. Three minutes doesn't seem like long, but it can also seem like an eternity. You want your welcome to be clear and sharp, and your introduction to be engaging and brief enough that people know what the talk is about without feeling like they've already experienced the talk. As much as possible we want the intro to be grounded in a personal story, whether experienced by yourself or someone close to you. The goal is to help us grasp how God's Word speaks to every issue of our lives.

Announcements. Announcements can be tricky as there's often a lot of details to get across in a short amount of time. But a few things to keep in mind.

First, make sure you've spoken to one of the pastors ahead of time to know what announcements are coming up.

Second, have a read over of the weekly newsletter that's emailed out each week – they're great places to find extra details about what's happening in the life of Village.

Third, the ministry team will always make sure that there are slides for all the major announcements – try to get to church around 15 mins early to go over the slides.

Finally, the beauty about having slides is that they can do all the heavy lifting when it comes to the details. Your role, then, is to deliver the announcements in a way that connects them with who Village is or what we're on about. Instead of just listing the details, talk about what we hope will come from the event, or how it reflects something of what we believe or value as a community. You might even be able to share a highlight from a previous experience of the same event / announcement. The point is that sharing the announcements should feel less like a public reading of the bulletin and more like sharing some particularly exciting family news.

Sermonettes for the MC. Sermonettes are probably the hardest to avoid for the MC, as they have the most time behind the microphone, and their role most closely aligns to the preacher. Two things to avoid falling into this trap:

First, you want to remember that your role at the start of the service is to introduce, or point to, what the talk is about; not explain, unravel and apply what God's word says about the topic.

Second, your role at the end of the service is not to regurgitate the sermon, but to reflect on it and encourage people to talk about it further. For example, talking about how you have struggled with or experienced the topic or theme of the passage might be a good lead in to the service. Afterward, reflecting on one thing that you were challenged or encouraged by – without indicating that it was the point of the entire talk – might be a good way to end. The challenge is not to undermine the talk or push upon people your own personal interpretation of it, but to get people back to what God's word says and considering how to act on it. Combined with that, you want to do it in a way that's concise and engaging. This is a tough job that requires preparation and practice!

Notes are fine, but the end-goal is towards not using notes. There can be two things which shape the need for notes. The first is the nerves that come with standing in front of a large group of people and forgetting what you need to say. This is completely understandable, so if notes help give you the confidence to say what you intend to say, go for it. The second need for notes though can be driven by the complexity of what you're saying. If that's the case, you want to both simplify what you're saying and come up with "techniques" for speaking without notes, or perhaps with smaller prompts. This will be something the staff team will work on with you.

Never stand behind the lectern / musician mic stands. A big part of this is to be able to engage and connect with the audience. The MC, along with the Music Leader, is the tone-setter for the service, so as much as possible you want to reduce the space between you and those you're speaking to. The sound tech will always ensure that you have a handheld mic front and centre of the lectern. As much as possible stand in front of the lectern when you're doing your introduction / wrap-up as well as when you're interviewing people or praying.

Kids' Talk (Morning Service)

In our Sunday gatherings we want to reinforce and celebrate the truths of the gospel in the lives of all who come along – including our kids. Our hope for all the kids that come along on Sundays is that they build friendships with other kids and adults around the gospel and that as adults we're constantly reaching out to the kids in love as we commit to helping one another grow as followers of Jesus. We think this best happens in a positive, fun, and relational environment.

Gathering with our kids: In their engagement with kids, churches can sometimes go one of two ways, both of which we feel are unhelpful for what we're trying to achieve at Village. One way is to have virtually no presence of kids in the Sunday

gathering. The other is to market the entire church toward families, often at the expense of those who may be young, single, or who don't have kids for various reasons. It's a hard balance to strike, but one that's worth working out.

Therefore, at Village Church, when we first get together on Sundays we all gather to sing and hear what's happening in the lives of people in the Village community. We do this all together. In the morning service, the kids have the opportunity during the break to leave for Kids' Church where they sing songs, hear an age-appropriate talk on the same passage we're going through as a church, and do some crafts together. However, kids are always welcome to stay with us for the talk, and we aim to finish Kids' Church in time for the kids to join us for the last song and especially for the Lord's Supper if we're having it.

The Kids' Talk. But about once a month we want to specifically address the kids in the formal part of our service as a way of valuing them and signalling to the rest of the congregation that we're all in this together. The kids' talk is an opportunity to set-up what we'll be exploring in God's word together as a church. A good kids' talk will be just as helpful to the adults as it is for the kids! As such, the kids' talk will replace the MC intro whenever we have one.

Keep it simple. It will be the MC's role to arrange the kid's talk either by giving it themselves (remember: this will replace your regular intro) or arranging one of the kids' leaders to do it. If the MC wants to lead the kids' talk, feel free to speak to one of the kids' coordinators for ideas, suggestions, tips or help.

Short, creative, and FUN! Just like the MC intro you should aim for about 3 minutes. Your goal isn't to unpack the whole passage but to engage the kids in a way that they can grasp while being fun and engaging. Tell a personal story. Make them laugh. Sing a song. Get them involved. Have fun with it and put some energy into what you're doing. We want the kids to know that the gospel is for

them, too, and we want to show the rest of the congregation that no matter your age, the gospel always shapes the way we want to think, feel, and act as believers.

Break

The break provides a chance for the kids to be dismissed in the morning but it also gives the congregation the opportunity to welcome newcomers and connect with those around them – the first step in sharing our lives with one another.

Village Voices

This is an opportunity to hear a testimony or personal story from someone in our congregation. These interviews will usually tie into the theme of the talk and should always include a personal story about who Jesus is, what he means to the person sharing, and why they continue to follow him. The goal is to help make the gospel story compelling and relevant in our everyday lives.

Congregational Prayer

The beauty of prayer is that any of God's people can do it. The power of prayer is not how articulate or theologically astute we are, but the mediator – Jesus Christ. Because of this, we can be confident that God really does hear us when we speak to him. Therefore, we want to bring the needs of our community and the world before our heavenly Father – as a community – giving thanks for what he has done, for what he is doing, and asking him to intervene in a world that desperately needs him.

Prayer points. In the lead up to Sunday, get the prayer points from Sam, the MC, or one of the ministry staff. Use these points to shape your prayer, but don't feel like you need to get through all of them or pray them as bullet points. On Sunday, get to church a little early to talk to the MC about when you're up. When it's time to pray, briefly introduce yourself (but avoid sermonettes!) and invite people to join with you in prayer.

Be simple. Pray in such a way that we can all follow your words, agree with them, and give a hearty “Amen” at the end. Have only a few points. Keep your ideas clear. Your sentences short. Your words simple.

Be brief. If we want people to stay with us, our prayer shouldn't be too long. If it's over 3 minutes, it had better be a rattling good prayer or else you'll lose people's attention.

Be heard. All your efforts will be wasted if people can't hear you. Stand in front of the lectern. Take time to adjust the microphone and speak toward it. Don't bow your head and mumble into your belly button.

Be normal. Be yourself! Don't put on a soft or spiritual voice or try to use many words to impress God or others. Use normal words — “thee”, “thou”, “thy”, “beseech”, and “unto” are not words that most people use.

Be prepared. Write out your prayers. If you don't write them out (or at least have detailed points), you might ramble and be full of churchy cliches. Writing organises your thoughts and gives you a clear start and finish.

Be interested. Something of the wonder and excitement of talking to God should come through in our prayers. Going over your prayer beforehand – maybe reading it out loud – will help give you an idea of how long your prayer will be and how you can use the dynamics of your voice – like pauses, change in tone, speed, or emphasis – to help us follow along and stay interested.

We are modelling a relationship with God. That is, we're not advertising upcoming events or church news. So when we pray for an upcoming event, pray for what we want God to do through this event or what we want to come out of it

rather than the details of it. For example, instead of saying, "Lord, we pray for the upcoming Community Dinner on Wednesday, from 6–7pm, at Community in the Urban Village..." we might say, "Lord, we ask that as a church we'd be able to serve our wider community and demonstrate your love for them at this week's Community Dinner...".

Be inclusive. Because you're not praying for yourself, but leading the whole congregation in prayer, use language such as "we" instead of "I" and "us" instead of "me." Likewise, when you invite the congregation to pray with you, be mindful that there will always be those who aren't yet Christian, so don't assume that they want to pray with us or adopt a certain posture while we pray. When you invite the congregation to pray, saying something like "if you like, please join with me in prayer" is more helpful than "everybody bow your head and close your eyes."

Be mindful. Remember we're praying to God, not about God. So we should avoid phrases like "We want to pray that God would...." Instead, we should say, "Lord, we want to pray that YOU would..."

Be sensitive. Village Church has people at all stages of following Jesus – long term followers as well as those checking him out. Use sensitive phrases like "followers of Jesus" and "those of us who don't follow Jesus" instead of Christian / non-Christian. Or when praying for evangelistic events, or for friends and family who aren't yet Christian, don't say "we pray that people would invite their non-Christian friends" but rather, "we pray that those who aren't yet Christian would be invited along so that they too can meet Jesus through this event..."

Balance your prayer. We want to talk about our brokenness and confess our sins both personally and corporately but in the end we always want to be dominated by grace and God's forgiveness and acceptance of us in Christ.

Bible Reading

In many ways the Bible reading is the most important part of what happens in our Sunday gathering. It is the time when we hear God speaking to us so this should affect how we treat the reading. The reading will therefore be delivered in a clear, confident, and easy-to-understand manner.

In preparation. Get the Bible reading passage (from the preacher / MC) the week before you're on. If you have a chance, talk to the person preaching and ask them what the big idea is and what bits are worth emphasising.

Pray. Ask God to help you understand the passage and be able to read it clearly.

Study. If the passage has a Community Group study with it see if the study questions and notes help you understand the main ideas in the passage, or read the passage from a good study Bible. This will help you emphasise the right words and ideas when you read out loud.

Practice, practice, practice! Read the passage out loud a few times a day in the lead up to Sunday. Check the pronunciation of words you aren't sure about. Get used to the tone and feel of the passage so you're ready when you get up.

Use a Bible. When you get up to read, please do so from one of the CSB church Bibles and *not* a smartphone / device. It's a great visual aid for people who aren't familiar with church and most of all it will ensure we are all reading the same translation. Some people prefer to print out the reading so they can have it in a bigger font and can highlight certain phrases or put in marks to tell you where to pause. That's fine, just check it against the hardcopy Bible and slip the print-out into the Bible so you're still holding the church Bible when up the front.

Set-up. Let the MC know you're there. You'll usually be on straight after the prayer, so make your way to a front-row seat, then just get up as soon as you're on. Stand in front of the lectern, with the MC mic, and speak clearly and confidently into the microphone.

Say hello. Before you start reading, say hi to the congregation and briefly introduce yourself. Let them know the passage and the page number in the black church Bibles, but also let them know that they can follow along on the screen. If they don't have a Bible, let them know that there are extra copies on the table beside the lecture door. Let people know that if they don't own a Bible, they are free to take a church Bible home as our gift to them.

Wait. Be chill, don't launch straight into the reading, and allow enough time for people to find the passage. Repeat the passage and page number a couple times. Wait until you hear most of the pages stop flicking! Let people get settled so they can focus on what God is saying.

Keep going. If you stumble, don't worry about it, just take a breath and keep going. Most people won't notice, and if they do, it's because they've done it themselves!

Sit down. After you finish reading there's no need to say anything, just head back to your seat and the preacher will come up.

Talk

We believe that God still speaks to us today, and the primary way he does this is through Jesus, his Word, whom we meet in every page of Scripture. Therefore, at the heart of our Sunday gathering is the opening up of the Bible as we proclaim the gospel message in such a way that the Holy Spirit can take God's word and re-shapes us into the image of God's Son.

Christ-Centred. Since we are a community built on Christ Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection, every part of the Bible will be taught with Jesus as the focal point.

Clear and engaging. Our talks will aim to be clear and engaging – applying the Bible in such a way that those who are Christians will grow as followers of Christ and those who do not yet know Jesus will be invited to follow him. Yet simple communication will be backed up with deep preparation and careful selection of the ideas and applications that are crucial. Clearer understanding will always lead to deeper understanding.

Grace-Driven. Since we are a grace-driven community, every part of the Bible teaching will reflect this through the language and attitude of the preacher. Hard truths will be delivered with humility and the preacher will work hard to understand the culture they are speaking into so that they might present Christ sensitively to the outsider.

Time for Questions. Following the talk there will be an opportunity for Q&A to ask any questions about the passage, push back on the preacher, or to encourage one another through what God is saying in the Bible.

Pastoral Prayer

These are prayers that normally follow the talk and are shaped by the preacher but not always given by them. These prayers will be a response to what we have just heard in God's word and often provide an opportunity for the congregation to confess their sins and trust in Christ's forgiveness. These prayers might also include elements of hymns, confessions, creeds, or prayers that have been passed down to the church over the centuries.

Summary

The goal of our Order of Service at Village Church reflects the fact that when we come to church we are often weary and in need of God's help. The trajectory of the service therefore begins with an invitational "come-as-you-are" attitude. But through singing, through speaking to God in prayer, and through the reading of God's word, our hearts are reminded of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. This emotional and spiritual trajectory reaches its climax in the preaching of God's word where the gospel is proclaimed and God goes to work conforming us into the image of his Son through the power of his Spirit. The service resolves as we are invited to respond back to God through prayer, singing, confession, and mutual encouragement through the community of God's people.

 **VILLAGE**
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