

TE6.06 Lead the Church Meeting

(6.5 hours)

Apprentice:	Trainer:	Completed: / /
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Our business as gospel ministers is to gather people together in various kinds of meetings, to hear the Word of God, pray and obey. Leading meetings and preaching are our life's work. Having led other aspects of church such as Bible reading, prayer and singing, it is an easier step to lead the whole meeting.

Many churches use their denominational prayer books and training is required to conduct such meetings effectively. There are enormous advantages in leading prayer book meetings: there is a gospel logic in the order, the prayers and responses are Biblical and well crafted, the congregation is confronted with the faith of the Reformers and there is a familiarity which reinforces the gospel over time.

This training exercise assumes an extemporary approach to church, without traditional prayer books. There is much to think about and decide when designing and leading a church meeting from scratch.

We live at a time when there is much experimentation and novelty in the conduct of church meetings. We need to train our Apprentices to think theologically about church. It is a key training exercise.

Exercise

Prepare and lead the Church meeting.

Aims

1. To learn to conduct meetings which reflect a Biblical theology of church
2. To learn to plan meetings, thinking through the flow and the purpose of each segment
3. To learn the skills of leading the church meeting

Apprentices

1. Work toward having 5 to 10 different people in regular Bible reading appointments.
2. Choose people at different stages of their Christian life: unbelievers, new Christians, struggling Christians and those you are training in some ministry. The requirement is simple - are they spiritually hungry? Read with anyone who is keen to learn more of the Scriptures and work out the implications for life.
3. Choose times that are efficient, for example, attaching appointments to other activities such as before or after church, work or sport.
4. There are many published studies that are suitable for one-to-one bible reading. For example, Interactive Bible Studies from Matthias Media.
5. Learn to read the Bible with an individual, just using the text of Scripture without a published guide. This can be the best approach in teaching someone how to read and apply the scriptures. The Ministry Tool, One-to-One Bible Reading (find below) provides a method to get started.

Trainers

1. Teach the purpose and activities of church (see attached notes).
2. Model how to lead a church meeting.
3. Work with Apprentices to design and lead a church meeting from scratch. (See attached notes for some suggested steps in this Training Exercise.)
4. Observe the Apprentice leading a church meeting and give feedback with a view to encouragement and development of skills. (NB. It may be best to start at a more relaxed weekend conference, rather than in a more formal and intimidating church meeting)

Resources

DP6.01 "How to run a meeting" (MTS Discussion Paper)

How to hold an Audience without a Rope, Clifford Warne

'The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity', Peter O'Brien, in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, (ed. D.A. Carson)

Engaging with God, David Peterson (Apollos: 1992)

'The Biblical Concept of Edification', David Peterson in *Church, Worship and the Local Congregation*, (ed. B.G. Webb)

'The Ministry of Encouragement', David Peterson in *God Who is Rich in Mercy*, (ed. P.T. O'Brien and D.G. Peterson) (Albatross: 1986)

'The Lord and His Church', Peter Jensen in *Church, Worship and the Local Congregation*, (ed. B.G. Webb)

Why do we meet together in Church?

There are many facets to the doctrine of church, which can be studied using the resources below. These brief notes focus on this one question, the purpose of our meeting in church.

a. To gather as Christ's gathered people

We gather in church because Christ has already gathered us as His people.

The word 'church' means 'assembly' or 'gathering'. We do not meet to achieve some further purpose. The creation of the church is God's eternal purpose (Eph 3:10,21). God has chosen and called us through the gospel to be His holy people (1 Thess 1: 4-5; 2 Thess 3: 13-15). We are raised with Christ and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph 2:6). Our earthly gatherings in church reflect what we are already, the gathered people of Christ.

b. To hear the Gospel, believe and obey

We meet in church to hear the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection and the call to faith and obedience. All need to hear this gospel every time we meet. We never move beyond the saving work of Christ and the need to hear and obey again. We hear this gospel through both the Word being preached and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Timothy was to devote himself 'to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, and to teaching.' By watching his life and doctrine closely, he would save both himself and his hearers (1 Tim 4:13-16).

Our meetings should be structured to reflect the Christian life of faith in the gospel. The whole meeting should be a teaching exercise, proclaiming what God has done for us in Christ and leading us to respond in prayer, confessing our sins, repenting, giving thanks to God and living a life of love for each other.

At the conclusion of our meeting, we should be able to say, 'we have met with Christ, our Lord and Saviour, through His Word.'

c. For our Salvation

What we do in church depends upon how we think God saves us and how we approach Him for salvation. Throughout the history of Christianity, there have been different answers to this question and so different views of church. If salvation is by priestly sacrifice, church will be a religious ritual conducted by holy mediators in a holy building. If salvation is by ecstatic experience of the divine, church will be an event designed to awaken our sense of the numinous by solemn music, grand architecture and impressive liturgy. If salvation is by using our human minds to grasp the divine, then church will be a lecture or debate. If salvation is by emotional frenzy, then church will be a pop concert.

If salvation is by hearing the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection and being justified by faith alone, the church will be about the ministry of this gospel to each other.

d. For the building of the Church

Christ is building His church (Matt 16:18). Therefore the activities of church are for edification (1 Cor 14: 3, 4, 5, 12, 17,26; Eph 4:11-16).

Edification is a metaphor for growth which has two aspects, both the numerical adding to the church through conversion and growth in knowledge, love and holiness.

e. For the encouragement of God's people

This is an important theme in the New Testament. We are not to give up meeting together, but must encourage one another, and all the more as we see the Day approaching (Heb 10:25). This ministry of encouragement is not a matter of providing general support and comfort, but is always related to the work of salvation in Christ and the hope we have in Him. Encouragement involves calling each other to persevere in faith, hope and love. It is often linked with edification. (Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 14:31; 2 Cor 1:4,6; Col 2:2; 4:8; 1 Thess 2:12; 3:2; 4:18; 5:11,14; 2 Thess 2:17; 2 Tim 4:2; Tit 1:9; 2:6,15; Heb 3:13).

f. For unbelievers to hear the Gospel

The Scriptures expect that unbelievers will be in church and that the ministry of the Word of God will result in their conviction and repentance (1 Cor 14:24-25). This is consistent with the goal of edification, which includes adding to the number of Christ's people.

g. For the learning of the Word of God

We come together to meet with Christ through hearing His Word. Christ is made known through the explanation of the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27, 45-47). So the ministries of proclamation, edification and teaching go hand-in-hand. The Pastoral Epistles stress this teaching ministry and the importance of true knowledge of God in the face of false teaching. (1 Tim 1:3-11; 4:1-16; 2 Tim 1:13-14; 2:1- 2; 2:14-19; 4:1-8)

h. To demonstrate our love and unity in Christ

This is the great theme of Ephesians. God's will is 'to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.' (1:9-10) Christ's purpose 'was to create in himself one new man out of the two' (2:15), by the cross, thus reconciling all humanity, Jew and Gentile in the church. The appeal then is to 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (4:2). We meet then, 'to consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds' (Heb 10: 24). Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness are the marks of our relationships with one another (Col 3: 12-14).

What are the essential activities of the Church Meeting?

These flow from the purpose of church and from various passages related to our conduct in church.

- Reading the Bible
- Teaching from the Bible
- Encouragement or exhortation from the Bible

- Prayer
- Singing to teach one another
- Speaking the Word of God to each other (1 Cor 14; Eph 5:15-20; Col 3:15-17; 1 Tim 2:1-8; 1 Tim 4:13; Heb 10:24-25)

Planning the Meeting

The key is to have a purpose in all that we do, rather than just churning out the familiar pattern.

1. The central activities are **hearing the Word of God and prayer**. All else that we include must serve to prepare us to read, understand and obey the Bible. If we include too many other elements, they will distract from this primary task. In one sense, the meeting creates the platform for the sermon.
2. The **introduction** serves to remind people why we are meeting and gives a genuine welcome to all. We are gathered together as a fellowship with the common purpose of meeting with Christ. Put people at ease.
3. **Introducing a 'theme'** which anticipate the lessons from the sermon, has many benefits. The interest level in the whole meeting is raised, and the whole meeting becomes a total communication package, not just ad hoc events. Remember not to steal the preacher's thunder, but rather to raise issues and questions in peoples' minds, which will be addressed in the sermon.
4. **Songs** can be chosen for different purposes. Some serve to reinforce the overall theme, others introduce the prayers or Bible reading segments or help us respond to God's Word. Of course songs are always meant to affect our various emotions in the context of meeting with Christ and his people.
5. **Prayers** should include thanksgiving, confession and responses to the sermon. Our petitions should be extensive, for congregational matters, pastoral needs, ministers of the gospel, our nation and its leaders and gospel mission everywhere. Giving just enough rationale for our prayers will draw the congregation into the urgency of each prayer.
6. **Announcements** should be kept to a minimum and other communication channels employed. However some news about members and church activities, not only serves a communication purpose, but also creates a sense of being in God's family. We are people who know and love each other. Stay in control of the notices, rather than letting anyone make announcements.
7. The **Bible readings** can be introduced with a comment or question, which helps to focus attention. Give some rationale for the readings and how they link together.
8. **Interaction with the congregation** reduces the sense of being a spectator or member of an audience watching a game or performance. Asking for responses to a question about the Bible reading, questions after the sermon, seeking prayer items from the floor or having 'open' prayer times are some ways of involving people. It is best to line up some beforehand to respond at these times, to help others speak up.
9. **Variety** is important week-by-week. Keep the congregation guessing a little. Try the sermon first

with the prayers and songs in response. Use testimonies from members to illustrate the theme of the meeting in some way. Try brief discussions with those around them. Have a short break in the middle before the sermon.

10. Make the meeting **accessible to unbelievers**. There are many ways of doing this. We can explain jargon, acknowledge that people come to find out about Christianity, offer newcomer's Bible study groups, comment that singing and praying might be new activities for some, and so on.
11. Make a big effort to **welcome newcomers**, putting them at ease, giving them a way to respond through a comment card and meeting them at morning tea or supper.
12. How **do we live** in response to hearing the Word of Christ?
13. Often the meeting tends to end abruptly with little time for **reflection, action and prayer**.
14. We need to develop the strategies of **leading the whole meeting in response to God's Word**. We know how to do it for unbelievers (pray the prayer, see the speaker, use the card).
15. We **let the believers off the hook**. In one sense the response is private and every time we hear the Word we make an automatic response of confirmation in the faith. After a while there are not as many 'big' jumps to make. But we can become complacent and hardened.

So we need more concrete responses for all, such as:

- The leader writes a prayer from the sermon passage that all pray
- The leader writes a confession of faith from the sermon passage that we all say
- Confession of sins
- More deliberate use of a song as response
- Spontaneous testimonies after the sermon
- Invite anyone to speak to a pastor about their sins and repentance or any spiritual help
- Give a question for discussion over morning tea or supper

Leading the meeting

- a. Plan in detail
- b. Write a detailed script
- c. Know the script thoroughly so you are not reading
- d. Develop spontaneity, responding naturally to what happens in the meeting
- e. Work out the timing of each element
- f. Start on time
- g. Brief participants in detail
- h. Watch the 'choreography', avoiding too many movements and delays with people getting to the platform
- i. Have a stage manager who controls the PA etc.