

MINDING THE GAPS: Making the Most of Transitions

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I. Introduction

How can we connect the different elements of our gatherings in ways that serve God's purpose and edify the church?

II. Why Talk About Transitions?

- A. God prioritizes understanding and being built up in our gatherings.

*"If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said?...**So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.**" (1 Corinthians 14:7-8, 12)*

- B. Intentional transitions increase people's participation and engagement.

"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." (Ephesians 4:15–16, ESV)

- C. Our services aren't a collection of random events, but a retelling of the story of God and what he has done in Christ to redeem us.

Containers vs. content

III. Who's Responsible for Transitions?

IV. Spoken Transitions – What Should We Say?

A. God spoke first and his words outlast ours.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb. 4:12; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16)

- Start your planning with God's Word.
- Have a Bible with you when you lead.
- Don't read Scripture casually or quickly.
- If you're going to make a point in the meeting, bring God's Word to bear.
- Seek to make Scripture the point of what you're saying rather than the springboard.
- Memorize, or at least be very familiar with, any Scripture you refer to.

B. Remember Aristotle's rules of rhetoric.

Logos – the truth of the subject.

- "What I'm saying is true."

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31–32, ESV)

"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:1–2, ESV)

Ethos – the character of the speaker

- "You should believe me."
- Qualities that can affect ethos are sincerity, naturalness, history of relationship, transparency, and engagement.

Pathos – the effect on the listener

- “What I’m saying matters.”

*“And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he **reasoned** with them from the Scriptures, **explaining** and **proving** that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.”” (Acts 17:2–3, ESV)*

“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” (1 Timothy 1:5, ESV)

“It is not arrogant to re-present as forcefully as we can God’s gospel; it is simply faithful stewardship.” D.A. Carson

C. Behold the beauty of brevity.

- Say what you need to say: one thought, one contrast, one Scripture, one application.

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14–16, ESV)

D. Don’t underestimate the value of preparation.

E. Don’t assume every space must be filled.

- While there’s no “rule” that says we can’t say something in every space, it’s generally not a good idea. You only need a road sign when you turn.
- Plan so you don’t have to say that much.

F. Don’t assume you have to play your instrument while you’re speaking.

G. Consider the beginning and ending of your meeting as transitions.

- From daily life to encountering God together. (Call to worship)
- From glorifying God together to glorifying him as individuals or families. (Benediction)

V. Musical Transitions – What Should We Play?

A. Kinds of Musical Transitions

- Synth Pad – Usually the tonic of the song you just sang. Could be 4 chord as well. Usually no 3rd.
- Intros/Outros – Chords from the last song or next song.
- Unrelated harmonic progression – 1-1sus-1-1sus, 1-4-1-4, 1-4-6m-4, 1-5-6m-4
- Drums – Come Praise and Glorify,
- Modulations

B. Benefits of musical transitions

- Can minimize distractions between elements
- Can continue the emotional tone of what was just said or sung (end of meeting)
- Gives people time to reflect, like a *selah*
- Can complement the emotional tone of what's being spoken.
- Can make a change in speakers or elements less awkward

C. Drawbacks of musical transitions

- Can lead people to think music = Holy Spirit. “Why a Synthesizer Isn’t the Holy Spirit”
- Can lead people to think God needs music to act, speak, or show up

“Christian musicians must be particularly cautious. They can create the impression that God is more present when music is being made than when it is not; that worship is more possible with music than without it; and that God might possibly depend on its presence before appearing. (Harold Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, p. 153)

- Can create distractions between elements.
- Can disrupt the content flow (long intros and outros)

D. Guidelines for musical transitions

- Be willing to humbly evaluate what you do in light of Scripture, not cultural norms.
- Encourage your musicians to be attentive to what's being said. Allow spaces for words to be heard.
- Think creatively simple rather than creatively complex.
- Vary your transitions.
- Think of transition music as a help rather than a necessity.
- For spontaneous transitions, use short chord progressions, i.e., 2 chords rather than 4.

VI. Other Transitions

A. Congregational

- Clapping -appropriate response at times, with those in front joining in
- A capella singing – to end or start a song
- Greeting

B. Spontaneous

“The Holy Spirit helps us plan but our plans are not the Holy Spirit.” – CJ Mahaney

C. Silence

“But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”
(Habakkuk 2:20)

“When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” (Revelation 8:1)

D. Prayer

- Can serve both as an element of your liturgy and a transition
- Even if a prayer serves as a transition, think through it.
- Longer prayers (pastoral prayer) may need an introduction.
- Root your prayers in God's promises, not simply our responses.
- Connect your prayers to what you've just been meditating on.
- Use phrases from songs to deepen their impact and help connect elements.
- Remember you're praying for the group, not just yourself.

VII. Conclusion