

# TTT376 - Hosting Sunday Worship Series. Part 3 - The Welcome

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20 August 2024

## Introduction

Do you feel welcomed by being told off? How about by someone confessing their sins? I have seen both done by people doing what is sometimes called "the welcome". On neither occasion did I feel welcomed. In my opinion this is the part of our Sunday services which is least well understood in terms of its purpose. Let's put that right in this episode.

Today, we continue a series exploring why we do what we do at a Sunday gathering. So far, we have introduced the concept of 'hosting' to frame the role of those leading us in public worship. We examined some New Testament examples and teachings on collective worship. We also considered the aims of collective worship. Last week, we explored general guidance for leaders of worship, including context, attitude, connection, themes, overloading, and preparation.

This week, we focus on one specific part of our Sunday worship - "The Welcome".

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## Tradition

What we call "The Welcome" is a tradition. No one knows where, when and why it started. It's not a bad tradition, but it helps to remember that it is neither commanded in Scripture nor necessary for our collective worship to be legitimate or effective.

That being said, welcoming everyone to worship fits the hosting model we explored in previous episodes.

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## What are we doing?

We are welcoming people to collective worship in the conscious presence of our heavenly Father. We are not "doing the welcome" as it is often phrased, but welcoming people. "The welcome" is not a thing but an action. It is an expression of love. It is an invitation. It is a call to wholehearted participation in what makes our collective worship meaningful: Worshipping God together in prayer and song, learning from God's Word together, fellowshiping together, and communing together (the Lord's Supper).

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# How do we welcome people?

Be welcoming. Smile. Look at people. Warmth is more important than anything else. If you are glad to see everyone (let's hope so!), let it show. The question to ask yourself is whether everyone present feels welcomed and accepted by God.

## Some specific tips

1. Connect with what has just happened and what is about to happen: "That song moved me because....now the children will...."
2. If we have a visiting speaker, introduce them with enough detail to clarify why they are with us. If you do not know them, ask someone who does to introduce them.
3. Involve the children whenever possible.
4. Keep it simple. There is nothing wrong with saying, "Welcome to our worship today. It's lovely to see all of you. Let's pray..."
5. Make God the focus, not the congregation, nor yourself or current events. If you do mention yourself, the church or contemporary issues, connect them with God, preferably using Scripture. For example, if political elections are on the horizon, that's a good opportunity to reference the following passage and use it as an inspiration for the prayer that follows.

1 Timothy 2.1-2

"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."

## Common gaffes to avoid

1. Embarrassing people. "If you are visiting for the first time, please stand up so we can welcome you." The intention is sincere, but the experience for most first-time visitors is painful. They already feel insecure in an unfamiliar situation - now they have a crowd of strangers staring at them!
2. Over-hyping. "We're going to have a great service today!" Better to say, "I'm looking forward to our time of worship today." Sometimes, our services are not especially inspiring! Also, the service's effectiveness depends on the attendees' experience. Telling people it will be 'great' is tantamount to telling them how they ought to feel.
3. Preaching. It's not a problem to share something God taught you, but don't make it a 10-minute lesson. We have a sermon coming.

4. Jargon. Phrases like, "I was convicted...my discipler...quiet time..." are alienating for our guests. It's better to say, "I felt guilty....the person mentoring me...praying and reading the Bible..." etc.

## Questions for reflection & discussion

What helps you to feel welcomed to an event? If we did not have a "welcome", what would our collective worship lose?

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## Summary

It is delightful to be warmly welcomed to someone's home. Let's remember what we are trying to do, and not get stuck in unexamined tradition. Take the pressure off yourself by recognising your demeanour is more important than your words.

It's time for the challenge of the week. The next time you have an opportunity to publicly welcome people on a Sunday, challenge yourself to be brief, to the point, but warm.

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## Next week

Next time, we will consider the purpose and practice of collective prayer.

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Please add your comments on this week's topic. We learn best when we learn in community.

Do you have a question about teaching the Bible? Is it theological, technical, or practical?

Please send me your questions or suggestions. Here's the email: [malcolm@malcolmcox.org](mailto:malcolm@malcolmcox.org).

If you'd like a copy of my free eBook on spiritual disciplines, "How God grows His people", sign up at my website: <http://www.malcolmcox.org>.

Please pass the link on, subscribe, and leave a review.

"Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs." (Psalms 100:2 NIV11)

Keep calm and carry on teaching.

God bless, Malcolm