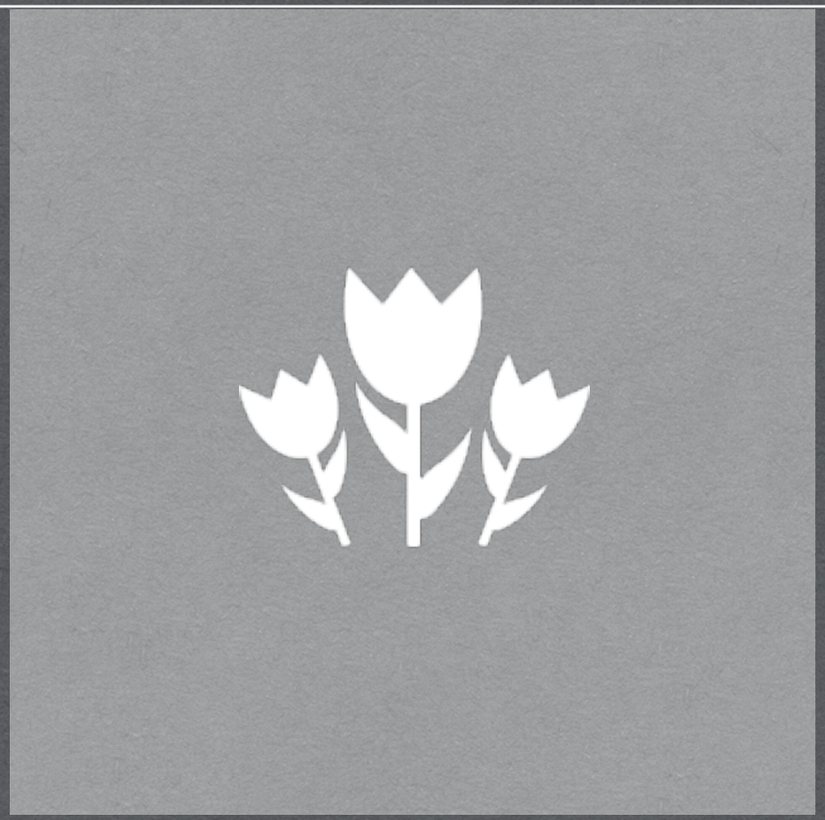
THE
ESSENTIALS
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5 BEST PRACTICES FOR LEADING WORSHIP FOR A FUNERAL

worshiptraining

INTRODUCTION

How do we lead worship for a funeral?

If you've ever been asked to lead worship for a funeral service, you know just how daunting it can be. How do we go about leading the music for such a pivotal, emotional event in so many peoples' lives? How do we plan and prepare music that will comfort and strengthen a grieving family?

Whether the funeral service you are about to lead worship for is small, large, for an elderly person, or even for a child or teen, there are two words you need to hear in your heart – Relax and Trust.

God is near to the broken-hearted; and He is with you as you serve those who are mourning with music that brings both encouragement and comfort. He are a few questions to ask yourself as you prepare for your part in the service.

INTRODUCTION

1. What makes a funeral unique?
2. Which instruments should I choose?
3. Where can you go?
4. Are you choosing the songs?
5. How can I serve with the music?

PRACTICE 1 - WHAT MAKES A FUNERAL UNIQUE?

What makes a funeral unique?

One of the main things that makes a funeral unique, when compared to a wedding, baby dedication, or church service, is that people are in grief. In some cases, there are people present who may be feeling a significant amount of anger. Still others may have a tremendous sense of regret related to the person who has died. Emotions in the room are all over the map.

Music can be a healing balm at a funeral – a balm through which many find strength, orientation, and calm. As we plan, we must recognize that people are in a very vulnerable place when they arrive. Peoples' thinking will often be clouded by their emotional state, which is understandable as their lives have been so disrupted by their loss.

In this environment the worship leader or musician is in the perfect position to create an atmosphere of peace – and to work with God to create a sense of His nearness for those gathered.

PRACTICE 2 - WHICH INSTRUMENTS SHOULD I CHOOSE?

Which instruments should I choose?

Consult with the family, and/or the pastor officiating the service, to talk about what they think would be appropriate music for the service. Serve them, and serve this gathering.

Instruments, in some ways, can be decided based on the songs chosen. The family may come to you with songs that were meaningful to the deceased person. In some cases, the family may choose some sacred, worshipful songs. Or they might ask you to throw in some more popular songs that you don't really want to sing. You'll have to weigh that up – what do you have grace to do in that particular setting?

Work to create a space that comforts those who have gathered. This may mean you choose more acoustic instruments for the event, or that you even simplify the amount of instruments playing. A piano and an acoustic guitar, or a piano and a violin or cello, are perfect combinations for a funeral setting. Leave the drum set out of the equation.

PRACTICE 3 - WHERE CAN YOU GO?

Where can you go – and where should you not go?

In a funeral setting, we want to make sure that we do not overstep our bounds. This is not the time to be spontaneous, or to lengthen your section without a request from the family (especially if other parts of the service have not occurred yet).

On a musical level, know your boundaries as well. Consider using some instrumental pieces for your section of the service, so that people can silently pray their own prayers rather than singing the lyrics of others. Instrumental music can facilitate people sitting in silence, aiding them as they mourn, grieve, or struggle with their questions.

Music can bring healing and wholeness and remember, with the craziness of funeral preparations, this may be the only moment the family has for some form of “silence.”

A funeral service is not necessarily an event that people want to be an extended experience, so whatever you do, make sure you and the family (or presiding pastor) are in agreement. Then, stick with the plan.

PRACTICE 4 - ARE YOU CHOOSING THE SONGS?

Are you choosing the songs?

If you're the one choosing the songs, and the family isn't telling you everything they'd like you to sing, find where the themes "cross." In other words, ask yourself, "What are the themes in the worship songs I know that 'cross' with the themes that might be important in an environment of grief?" Some of these themes might be:

Who God is – God who doesn't change when there is turmoil in our hearts, whether someone has lost a child, a parent, or a grandparent. His love remains, and tomorrow He will be there just like today.

What Heaven is like – Eternity, where Revelation says there will be no more tears, is always an appropriate theme.

God's comforting presence – Singing about the presence of the Father, the presence of the Jesus, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, is always good and right in a funeral setting.

God is not changing and is faithful – He is who He is, and He stays the same. Incorporate the theme that God is always faithful. This theme brings comfort, orientation, settledness, and focus into very disruptive times in one's life.

The Psalms – Many Psalms, like Psalm 23, speak of God's provision, consolation for the soul, and ongoing care. These themes will minister to those gathered. The book of Psalms is full of cries of the heart mingling with trust.

PRACTICE 5 - HOW CAN I SERVE WITH THE MUSIC?

How can I serve with the music?

Serve, serve, serve. Even if no one is effectively managing all the details of the service, or giving you clear guidance (when you should show up, where you should set up, what your part will be in the service) just show up early and set up as best as you can before others arrive.

Showing up early and being well prepared (to be flexible) will benefit everyone planning the service. Work hard not to add to the stress that already surrounds the event, and especially avoid arriving late or asking too many questions (as if your part in the service is more important than the other parts).

See the music as “accompaniment” to the melody of the other service elements. Shared stories, a spoken message of hope, embraces by family and friends, and tributes about the person who has died are what will last longest in the memories of those who attended.

ACTION STEPS

> Try at least one idea the next time you are asked to lead at a funeral.

Leading worship for a funeral is one of the most precious gifts you can give to a family, and it is one of the most centering acts of servant leadership a worship leader can experience.

Prayerfully go to God and ask Him to make you a vessel of comfort, healing, wholeness, love, and encouragement to those who are in mourning.

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