

How to lead worship on Alpha

Worship on Alpha

- Worship on Alpha has different governing principles from Church worship.
- It is Christ centred, but guest sensitive. We must be aware that we are taking people on a new spiritual journey, and be selective in the choice of songs and hymns. It is ministry to our guests.
- Many of the guests on Alpha will have their own ideas and certain pre-conceptions about Christians, Christian music, and perhaps have a worldly perspective of Church music and music in general. They will be used to seeing the pop-star/singer/conductor/orchestra or composer receiving adulation and worship, for instance. They may never have sung about, or to, God before –perhaps only ever sung at a football match or in the bath / shower!
- They may be very apprehensive about coming on the course anyway, and so the idea of singing and being expected to join in might add to their concerns.
- Therefore we want to put people at ease – to explain – to let them know what is happening and reassure them. We are equipping them with a new language of gratitude, thankfulness and adoration. Things are much more easily caught than taught.

Here is a little checklist to help you in your planning:

Prayer, Preparation, Practice, Communication.

Prayer

- The foundation. Pray for the guests, the times of praise and worship, for guidance with the choice of music, for all the team, and for unity. We must not forget that there is a spiritual battle. When souls are being won for Christ there will be opposition, so make prayer a priority and a habit. Pray before each session, individually and with the team.

Preparation

- Think carefully about the choice of songs. They should initially favour objective truths - songs about God, rather than to God. Ask advice if you need help. Do the songs you have chosen suit your instruments?
- You can use guitar, piano, and voice – whatever suits you best.
- The course is designed for those with little or no knowledge of Christianity or church life, so avoid songs and music with complex, old fashioned theological language at this stage.
- Use the formula of the song-list in the appendix to help you. (You may have your own songs and music, but bear in mind the principles we are discussing here.) Perhaps sing two songs at first with words that sing these objective truths. We try not to include songs where people are being asked to sing words that they don't yet own or believe.
- Some people on Alpha may be used to using the word Jesus as a swear word, but they often don't know anything about Him. Others may be indifferent towards Him. Therefore it is not appropriate to ask them to sing "I believe in Jesus", or "I love you, Lord".
- Only later in the course can the worship times begin to reflect a growing knowledge and love of God. The beginning of the journey towards intimacy.
- Choose, say, a traditional hymn, and then a more up to date song on the first week. Repeat one of them on the second week. Perhaps introduce three songs on week three.

How to lead worship on Alpha

- Plan ahead... are you using an overhead projector? If so make sure it works! Prepare acetates – or if you are using songbooks, check they are available, with no pages missing!
- If you are leading music for an older age group, the latest Soul Survivor rowdy worship songs for the youth group may not be appropriate!
- The same principal applies if you are planning for Youth Alpha – choose appropriate music and leaders.
- If the subject of the talk is about the cross, or Jesus, try to choose music, which compliments the theme of the evening's talk.
- Choose songs that are easy to learn at first. Simple/not simplistic; guests will feel re-assured and be able to join in.
- Check instruments and sound equipment, and cover every aspect of your evening - think of things that may go wrong, and check them!

Practice

- Mistakes are a distraction; they draw attention towards us and away from God. We hope to be invisible.
- This is why I emphasise the preparation time – bad sound / missing acetates or songbooks / out of tune guitars / pianos are all distractions.
- It is a little like me writing to you, and you receiving a letter full of spelling mistakes. The focus is in the wrong place, on the errors rather than the message.
- Practice is Biblical. King David chose Kenaniah and Asaph from among the Levites to lead the singing and music because they were skilful. Skill comes through practice, and it requires dedication.
- Keep things simple, and choose music within your ability range (the difficult chord!). Don't shoehorn in your favourite new song!
- Thoroughly rehearse the music and anything that you find difficult. If you are working with other musicians practice with them. We want to give our very best. Check the keys of the songs and hymns (The high chords!). It is often better to put music in a slightly lower key for smaller groups.
- Check the words; make sure you have sung through songs and hymns in case there are passages or phrases that are a little difficult.

Communication

- Firstly with your leadership, and also then with the team helping.
- Make sure everyone knows what is happening and when, so that everything can run smoothly and there are no areas of confusion.
- People arriving on Alpha are bound to be a little apprehensive as I have said. So, for that matter, will be the helpers, if they are from the previous course.
- We need to put people at ease and make them feel welcome and relaxed, so communicate with them. Let them know exactly what is going on, so that the atmosphere is one of acceptance and welcome. This is most important on the first few evenings until friendships begin to grow.
- When you introduce the worship time, say something simple and explanatory. Make sure that the destination is clear at the outset, even if not everyone is going there straight away.
- We want to encourage a flow of worship, so allow God to communicate by the power of the Spirit. Do not give long introductions to each song, and plan for a flow of worship, especially later in the course when singing more songs.

How to lead worship on Alpha

The Evenings

- A key governing principle of Alpha. 1 Peter 3 v 15. "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect". This respect for the individual is a key principle of Alpha.
- Remember to communicate and let people know what is happening, and what is about to happen. As I have explained, this does not require mini-sermons before and between the songs, but simply requires clear leadership. Keep any speaking short and to the point in the early part of the course. Don't ramble!
- The introduction; think about what you are going to say. (*Give example*)
- Aim to be transparent, to point the way to God.
- Follow the guidelines; don't have endless musical repetitions of certain sections of the songs, and be confident, even in the face of disasters! Leaders lead. Don't be put off if people don't join in straight away. Remember that we are, in a sense, teaching worship, and enabling God to have space and time to move in the hearts and minds of those present.
- As the course progresses, remember to develop the songs and hymns and their content. Keep checking what the words say, and their relevance to each evening.
- We want to take people to a place of personal response, singing to God, not just about Him, and using words which reflect the changing spiritual dynamic. This is the journey towards intimacy with God, beginning with words that express universal truths.
- True worship is self-disclosure and obedience, and consequently freedom through our relationship with God. This is what we hope to accomplish through Alpha, and to help facilitate during the worship.
- If you don't have a gifted musician or singer, it is quite acceptable to sing along with a worship CD. The HTB worship resource pack has a CD (or cassette) with songs and backing tracks.
- It may be appropriate simply to listen to some church music and worship songs. However, we ultimately want to facilitate a personal response. The whole of creation is praising and worshipping God – the questions is, are we going to join in?
- The worship time is not a platform to impress, it is a time of servanthood, where we serve God's purpose. We are sign-posts towards God.
- The focus is always on Jesus, and we really worship for an audience of one, i.e. God.
- We plan our worship, (as in the discussion times) at the pace of the slowest member of the group. The servant attitude.
- Remember that we are involved in a process, taking people from the world and into the kingdom of God – to a place of understanding and deep relationship with God.

George Herbert.....

“Teach me my God and King,
In all things Thee to see
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee.”

“... A man that looks on glass
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleases, through it pass
And then Thy heaven espy.”

How to lead worship on Alpha

WORSHIP ON ALPHA

Suggested songs

Week one:	Praise to the Lord Give thanks
Week two:	Give thanks When I survey the wondrous cross (hymn)
Week three:	Blessed be the name of the Lord. (He is our rock). Breathe on me (hymn) God is our refuge and our strength
Week four:	Father of lights Amazing Grace Here is love (hymn)
Week five:	Praise God from whom all blessings flow Amazing Grace Here is love (hymn)
Week six:	We worship and adore you Praise God from whom all blessings flow Lord I lift your name on high Every day I look to you
Weekend onwards	By this stage of the course, most guests are opening up to the idea and practice of worship and we suggest that the local church use whichever songs they feel would best help the guests concerned to worship God.