

SERVICE OF CONSECRATION TO THE LORD'S FUTURE

This service works best when it is lead by a team, ideally four different people including laity. It makes most sense if they be from the leadership group of the church to demonstrate a commitment to the values called for in the service. Each person will lead one of the four sections. The first person will also do the service introduction. A staff member should NOT do the fourth section. (Figure one hour for the entire service)

Introduction of Service:

In Acts 1 we find Jesus and the disciples after the resurrection and before his ascension. In verse 8 the disciples essentially ask "What's the plan now?" In verse 9 Jesus replies with the familiar verse that the disciples are to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. So, they ask, "What's the plan?" and he replies "You're the plan!" As we look to our future, regardless of strategies and ideas, in the end, we are the plan first and foremost. This service is about setting ourselves apart to God; to consecrate ourselves as one, just as the nation of Israel would come together as one to dedicate themselves to God in the face of challenges ahead.

This service will guide us through four dimensions of the heart needed to walk forward with God into the future. Each section will follow a similar rhythm: A Biblical principle, a related Biblical passage, a brief comment on the passage by the leader of that section, a unison prayer, a song, and an open prayer by the congregation.

Biblical Principle #1. *Moving forward into God's future begins with redemptive theology, repentance and prayer. It does not begin with structures, strategies or systems, but with people who are "broken" before God who redeems all things for good. (Repeat)*

Scriptures: Psalm 139:23-24

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting".

Comment:

In Psalm 139 David acknowledges that God knows him better than he knows himself. God understands his strengths, his foibles, his strong points, his vulnerabilities, his character, and the defects in his character. And as David faces a stress-filled future, he closes this psalm by laying his heart bare before God with this three-fold prayer: search me, test me, lead me. Search me, test me, lead me.

Search me: Lord, is there sin in my life either that I knowingly hold on to, or is there sin in my life of which I am not even that conscious? God, help me be a holy and worthy vessel.

Test me: Lord, find me faithful. When I would rather give up, help me persevere. When I would rather trust myself, find me trusting you. When I would rather not learn lessons from the hardness of life, find me teachable, moldable, and receptive to what you have for me.

Lead me: Lord, I am tired of leading myself, tired of trying to figure it out on my own, tired of doing it my way either ignorantly or arrogantly or at worst both ignorantly and arrogantly. In humility I ask you to lead me into your future.

In our corporate desire to move forward with God, those three dimensions lead the way for us as well.

Lord, search us, test us, lead us. Find us holy, find us persevering, find us yielded to you. Join me in the unison prayer of confession.

Unison prayer of confession: (congregation)

We confess to you, Lord, what we are: we are not always the people we like others to think we are.

Forgive us for our slowness to learn from your Son, our failure to follow him as we ought, and our reluctance to bear the cross. Forgive us for our poverty of worship due you, our neglect of fellowship, our hesitating witness for Christ, Our evasion of responsibilities sin your service, and our imperfect stewardship of your gifts. And yet even as you know us as we are in our imperfection, yet you love us.

You love us as we are, not as we would be. For your grace and mercy we give our deepest thanks.

Help us, Lord, for we can do nothing apart from you. Amen.

Song: Refiner's Fire or Light the Fire

Prayers of the People:

We will now follow a pattern of directed prayer. I will suggest a topic, and you offer a prayer on behalf of yourself or on behalf of the congregation, or read a Scripture as a prayer:

In remembering that moving into God's future begins with hopefulness rooted in redemptive theology—namely that there is nothing that God does not take and use for good in our lives as we place it in his hands--,

1. Let us first offer verses of Scripture related to God holding the future or prayers of thanks to God that he redeems all things for good.

2. Let us intercede for ourselves collectively that we will be people of hope.

Biblical Principle #2: *Every church is in constant need of renewal, regardless of its current state of health. (repeat)*

Scripture: Isaiah 43:18-19

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

Comment:

Maybe you have heard the story of the man who put one hand on a hot stove and one hand in a bucket of ice, pondered things for a moment, then declared "on average I feel fine". Every church has things it can feel good about and things it is concerned about. And yet every church needs to find what God is calling it to as it moves forward. To not be moving forward is to stall or move backward. We can look back and find many things to be thankful for. We can look back and find many things to grieve or be disappointed about. But every church, regardless of its current state of health, is in need of constant renewal. Isaiah says, "Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" God asks us to have eyes to see the new things he is doing, how he takes all that has transpired, good and bad, and uses it, remixes it, and brings about a future we may not have anticipated. Join us in the unison prayer (*pause and then lead*).

Unison Prayer:

Lord, here we are, moldable as clay. Thank you for leading us in the past, protecting us, sustaining us, and watching over us in ways we will never know, preserving us for your purposes and for your glory.

Give us eyes to see and the ears to hear the new things you will do. Instruct our minds, direct our energies, and sustain us in obedience and service. Let us enter your heart, O God. Let us see what breaks your heart. Let our hearts break too. Amen.

Song: Open the Eyes of My Heart

Prayers of the People:

We will again follow a pattern of directed prayer. I will suggest a topic, and you offer a prayer or Scripture.

Remembering that every church is in need of constant renewal, regardless of its current state of health,

1. First give thanks to God for the things you are grateful about related to our congregation (*give time for prayer*)

2. Pray on behalf of your fellow friends and members, for our own corporate spiritual replenishment and revival of spirit. (*give time for prayer and close*).

Biblical Principle #3: *To move forward, a church must be centered in the mission and message of Jesus. "We need to do something so we don't decline" is vastly different from a renewed sense of mission flowing from the heart of Jesus. (repeat)*

Scripture: John 4:34-35

“Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”

Comment:

Jesus said his food is to do the work of the Kingdom of God. We all like different kinds of food—Italian, Chinese, Swedish—but food serves one principal purpose in life. It is fuel. We take in food so we have the energy needed to carry on our lives. Isn’t it interesting that Jesus did not say his fuel is worship, or prayer, or study, or fellowship? No, what gives him energy is attending to the priorities of the Kingdom of God. Sometimes we think that doing God’s work is WHY we need fuel; but actually it is a SOURCE of fuel. Think about it—when are you charged up the most about your faith? Isn’t it often related to seeing the results of God’s work in the lives of others? Seeing children at Backyard Bible Blast praising God, or hearing the testimony of someone God has helped through a tough time, watching the number of people we have sent into ministry right from here, seeing someone you care about take steps towards God? It is as we give ourselves to the work of God that we are strengthened, and the Kingdom advances. It isn’t first and foremost about what we can get out of church; it’s about what we can put back into the work of God. We get stronger, and so does the kingdom. Only by making the message and mission of Jesus paramount do we have the food that nourishes us for the days ahead. Join us in the unison prayer (*pause and then lead*).

Unison Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit.
Come as Holy Fire and burn within us.
Come as Holy Wind and cleanse us from within.
Come as Holy Light and lead us from the darkness.
Come as Holy Truth and dispel our ignorance.
Come as Holy Power and enable our weakness.
Convict us and consecrate us until we are set free from the service to ourselves, to be servants to your world.

Song: Here I am Lord

Prayers of the People:

We will again follow a pattern of directed prayer. I will suggest a topic, and you offer a prayer or Scripture.

Remembering that to move forward a church must be centered in the mission and message of Jesus,

1. First give thanks to God for spiritual fruit we have experienced as a church over the years.
2. Pray for the needs in the community around us, that we would be salt and light to these our neighbors.

Biblical Principle #4: *A church must invest in and take responsibility for joining with God in moving forward. (repeat)*

Scripture: Romans 12:1-2

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship. Do not conform to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Comment:

God enables us to do ministry, but we must enact. That is the rhythm of service to God—God enables, we enact. That is the point of the Apostle Paul in urging us to be a living *sacrifice*. Here is a definition of sacrifice: To give up something we love for something we love even more. We all have things that we love that could get in the way of service to God. We can love sleep, time for ourselves, accumulating more possessions, and so on. None of those things is intrinsically wrong. But Paul tells us that in light of God’s mercy in our lives, we at times are called to sacrifice those things we love for loving God even more. This church has an amazing legacy of people serving at sacrificial levels. God sees that, and honors that, in heaven even if we do not see the fruit as easily or as

abundantly as we would like on earth. But as we remain in Christ, as our strength comes from him, fruit does indeed ensue. In John 15 where Jesus talks about the vine and the branches, he promises that as we abide in him and he abides in us, the fruit will come in due course. He also says that without him we can do nothing. I have just one question: what part of “nothing” don’t you understand? Let us give ourselves faithfully in whatever capacity God has called on us to serve, but let us also remember to yield to his power at work in us. God enables, we enact, and the fruit comes in season. Join us in the unison prayer (*pause and then lead*).

Unison Prayer: (The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi)

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
 To be consoled as to console;
 To be understood and to understand.
 To be loved, as to love.
For it is giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Song: I Give You My Heart

Prayers of the People:

We will again follow a pattern of directed prayer. I will suggest a topic, and you offer a prayer or Scripture.

Remembering that a church must invest in and take responsibility for joining with God moving forward,

1. First pray about your own investment of time and effort. Ask God to confirm the best avenue of service for you and ask God to replenish your soul (give time for silent prayer)
2. Moses found that he could not do it all. He needed Aaron and Hur around him to support him in the battle. Pray for all of those who volunteer their service—youth leaders, children’s team, worship team, leadership team, soup kitchen team, community teams —anyone and everyone by name or by position—that they would find replenishment and strength and a glimpse of the harvest they are helping to reap.
3. And our staff and leaders need constant encouragement and replenishment. Join around ...(names of staff and leadership team). (Have congregation gather around the leaders for prayer)

Close of Service:

And so what’s the plan? We are the plan.

Closing Song: Multiply Your Love.

Benediction