Busy:

Reconnecting with an Unhurried God

Overview of the worship scripts from Dr. Marcia McFee

This Lent series is designed to give you suggestions for just about everything–all words, hymn and song suggestions, leader introductions, etc. But please know that if you want to adapt to fit your current order of worship, you can easily lift any of the suggested material and place it in a more familiar structure.

This overview will give you a sense of what's included each week in the order of worship. The package also includes ideas for visuals and media, children's time ideas, small group ideas, individual prayer practices (the "Prayer Chair"), and resources to add to your exegetical work to help you with your sermons.

The order of worship is the same for each week in the series. This goes with the concept I teach that repetition is a good thing and a solid foundation is necessary in order to be creative within it. Doing series can give you the opportunity to try on a slightly different order of worship or a different way of doing an element of the service for a season but keep it the same during that season, therefore offering some sense of familiarity and a rhythm. I have included a communion prayer separately from the scripts so you can fit that in whenever you have communion. If you do communion weekly, adapt my scripts by using that script as a model and edit according to the theme each week. As always, adapt the communion prayer to fit your tradition. In this series, I've created two versions of the communion prayer with two different songs woven in each.

This Lent series asks us to discern the cost of being so "busy," cluttered and stressed. So I thought it fitting to not make worship too cluttered, thereby not making your life more busy or stressed in putting it together. I'll mention how I've done that throughout this Overview. Suffice it to say, we must "practice what we preach." Spend your time before the season preparing yourself to be able to proclaim this message by taking a look at some of the documentaries, shows, blogs and books I've suggested in the Small Group and Sermon Fodder suggestions. You might invite the worship team (if you have one) to do that as well and really spend some time talking about this topic (over dinner, of course). Researching it has affected me deeply and I was inspired to simplify my life, get help for the things that stress me out, and make room to reconnect with an "unhurried God."

The "Anchor Image" (main metaphor) for the series is an empty chair–an image that beckons us to an un-busy moment. As I write this I am sitting in a wonderful rustic rocking chair on the porch of a little writing cabin my friend allows me to come to when I need to quiet my heart and shut out the rest of the world clamoring for my attention. I



hear the stream rushing from the latest rain, the birds are settling in for the evening and the trees–some charred from the Northern California fires–are rustling in the breeze. This is what this series is all about–finding these places/moments no matter how fleeting–to "come and find a quiet center." Our suggestion is to place a chair in the chancel area, perhaps with a knitted prayer shawl on it, and to pray the pastoral prayer there each week. Some of the verbiage for that prayer has been put in the "Prayer Chair Meditations" weekly documents that you can distribute to your congregants so they can designate a chair at home for the same purpose. When worship connects between sanctuary and living room (or writing cabin), we know we are being formed and shaped by our faith. I pray you find inspiration in this series to savor life and make a stronger connection to God.

Peace & Passion,
Dr. Marcia McFee



This photo shows how much the Spirit wants me to notice that I need to get "un-busy!" I drove past this BIG reminder on my way to the cabin and had to turn around and get a pic. Good thing I wasn't rushing! Ha!

A description of the season's worship experiences

Ash Wednesday

While typically an Ash Wednesday service is a brief time to come and hear Psalm 51 and get some ashes (nothing wrong with that), I wanted to create some ways that people could spend time discerning what lifestyle change they might try on for Lent that would help them engage with the theme of slowing down or "de-cluttering" some aspect of their lives. Interestingly (and totally random, I think), the **National Day of Unplugging happens the weekend before Ash Wednesday this year.** So I decided to offer a format for three kinds of experiences to prepare for Lent. The first is a retreat format that could be done in conjunction with the National Day of Unplugging on March 1-2 from sundown to sundown Friday-Saturday (You could even have the youth stay the night–I have fond memories of lock-ins. Of course, we never had to contend with being "unplugged" back then). The second format is a shorter retreat that is 3 hours in length and could be done on Ash Wednesday evening from perhaps 6-9pm (I think you could actually make it shorter if you needed to). The third format is a one-hour worship experience for Ash Wednesday. You would use this on Ash Wednesday even if you did the longer 24-hour retreat.



Six Weeks of Lent

I designed services for the six weeks of Lent, utilizing some repeated thematic items (I call them "threads") throughout to create a continuity even as the theme is expounded upon differently from week to week. Congregations have responded incredibly well to repetition within a season as it creates a rhythm that is unique to the message.

Holy Week

I always create one service for Holy Week. You may choose to do it on whatever day is best for your community and perhaps still have a service that is a tradition your parishioners hold most dear and would be sad not to practice. This series service actually draws on the idea that taking time to be with one another is very important in our crowded lives and so I have created something that could be done with dinner groups in people's homes or around tables in the fellowship hall. Especially in the midst of the intensity of the time, Jesus made it a priority to gather his friends for what he knew would be one last supper. And so shall we.

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A description of the flow and order of the weekly worship experiences

A note about the section titles: One of the ways I like to be creative in worship design is to use wording for the sections of worship that add to the theological understanding of the series theme. I have done this for this series. I also know that people may need some help understanding what the changes mean. So in the scripts you will see short explanations under each of the four sections of worship (typically "Gather," "Proclaim," "Respond," and "Send Forth." I'll copy them here for you to "get the drift."

Taking a Breather

As we gather together, we will use the first part of our service to slow down, to settle our souls so that we might reconnect with an "unhurried God."

Gather

This is the Prelude and is up to your musicians. We suggest that you set a contemplative tone for this series so that people can begin to settle in and slow down their rhythms as they come in, utilizing the power of music to affect our mood.

You may also decide to do your welcome and announcements here… OR you could use this series to try out NOT making announcements and just give people the information in a handout on the way out, thus "uncluttering" the service for the series. In that case, you might want to print something in the worship guide that says this so people aren't anxious, thinking you forgot it!

Slow It Down

This is what I call a "threshold moment." This concept that I teach introduces people to the journey and the theme of the day at the beginning of the service so that everything is seen through that lens. This section includes a little "drama" for three voices each week. I see these people scattered in the seating, popping up where they are (mic'd if you have a sanctuary that needs amplification) and calling out across the room to each other. You could use the same people each week or switch it up. We have provided a clock-ticking audio file you can use under this to help create that sense of "busy." Here is an example:

[A clock soundtrack starts ticking and 3 people stand up and shout to each other from their seats around the sanctuary…]

Voice 1: *(to voice #2)* Yoo hoo!!!! How are you?
Voice 2: *(very dramatic)* I'm soooooo busy!

Voice 3: You can say that again!
Voice 2: I'm soooooo busy!
Voice 3: I didn't really mean that literally. Just that I KNOW what you mean! I keep meeting myself comin' and goin'!
Voice 1: Whew, indeed! When will the rat race end?

[The clock-ticking recedes as the instrumentation (BEACH SPRING) comes in and continues under the next words…]

When the dramatist's lines are done, the pastor continues with a paragraph that introduces the theme as the calm strains of the theme song begin to play underneath (organ, piano, or guitar). We are modeling the "slowing down" that we hope the whole series will help people feel in their lives. Our theme song, "Come and Find the Quiet Center," is scattered throughout the service, beginning here with verse one that reminds us "clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes that we can see…"

Catching Our Breath/Prayer for Clearing Out

The opening prayer is accompanied by an invitation to take off our watches or turn off our phones as a sign of commitment to give ourselves a break… if only for this hour. If that makes us anxious to do so, this is a good indication we should look at why.

Opening Song

As usual, we have chosen hymns (for more "traditional/classic" worship) and songs (for more "modern/contemporary" worship) as suggestions. But you can also feel free to adapt our suggestions, using something more beloved by your congregation if you choose. See the Music Document for a guide to our acronyms in the script. An important note here: Because I want this series to be "unbusy," if what I have suggested is not familiar, please do change the selection. In this series, I have placed the theological criteria I used in making my selections so that you can have a guide to making your own selections.

Peace

After the hymn/song is finished, people are invited to a conversation with someone around them based on the theme of the day. You may want to give a bit more time for this since it is question and answer mode. For those of you who typically include confession at the beginning of the service, I have included that in the prayer time after the sermon so that the topic of the day has sunk deeper in us before we have a "time out" (what I'm calling the confession/prayer time).

Taking Note

The second part of our service invites us to "take note" of what God is saying to us this day, through the children, through the music and through the sermon.

Hanging Out

We've created a separate document that further explains how to prepare for the children's time. We have made suggestions about how you can do activities with the children that teach a way of "chilling" or "hanging out" connected to the theme for each week. There are some that require "crafting" some objects beforehand, so check that document out and plan how you will get those created (you could do it with children each week in Christian Ed in preparation for the next week or just have the objects created by a volunteer team). I personally am making my own "time out sensory glitter bottle" for myself (so cool)!

Reconnecting (Scripture)

There is one scripture for each of these services, keeping it simple. However, if you are a church that has a tradition of more scripture, feel free to add complimentary additions. In the spirit of "unbusy," these scriptures are simply read but I do invite you to begin a soft underscoring of the introduction to the anthem/band song that will follow so that the reading flows right into the music.

From the Playlist (Anthem/Band song)

My title, "From the Playlist," is a way of inviting you to "unbusy" your preparations for this series and choose things you have done before, rather than learning new material. Perhaps this would free up some time in choir or band rehearsal to do a meditative practice based on the Prayer Chair reading for the week, deepening your prayer life together and your communal connection to God, who calls you to this ministry. We have not made suggestions in this series as we have in other series for this reason.

Focusing on the Main Thing (Sermon)

In the scripts, you will see that I have written the "gist," or main points, I used in creating the worship. In the Small Group and Sermon Fodder document, I offer some resources

to help get you steeped in the topics for each week. My friend and collaborator, Dr. Eric Elnes, has made a sermons related to these six services available to you (sold separately) as well as the Darkwood Brew video episodes for small groups (sold separately) for use by small groups or simply to aid you in your sermon preparation.

Taking Care

The third part of our service is our response to having listened for God's word. We "take care" to focus through prayer, offering [and communion] on what's really important, really essential, to lives lived with depth.

"Time Out" in the Prayer Chair

"If you raised children, or are raising children, or even if you haven't or aren't, you've heard of a "time out." We give a time out when a break is needed. Perhaps we need to think about the consequences of an action or we just need to break the intensity. Perhaps we are spiraling emotionally and need some perspective. Perhaps we just need to get quiet so we can change the course of action. In this series, we are giving ourselves a "time out" and we are sending ourselves to the Prayer Chair."

Those words you just read are what I have written in the script to introduce prayer time. As I mentioned above, I see the pastor going then to sit in the Prayer Chair in the chancel to move into the prayers. It starts with some silence and then the second verse of our theme song begins–"Silence is a friend who claims us, cools the heat and slows the pace…" The next words are confession and assurance (the same words are printed in the personal Prayer Chair pages that people will take home with them to pray during the week) and then I suggest that you go into a Pastoral Prayer (of course I didn't write this… you will weave concerns and joys from your community into this). If you have a tradition of people speaking aloud prayers, try collecting those early in the service in some written form and weaving those into your prayer as an alternative for this series. This keeps the prayer less "busy" and keeps us more meditative and focused.

Noticing What's Important (Offering)

This is the time of monetary offering. In the spirit of giving musicians a lighter load for this series, you might think about having people give testimony at this time to the ways they are fasting from the "busy" of their lives.

I've written a doxology to follow the offering that can be sung to OLD 100th:

For time to savor God's good gifts
For space to breathe and hearts to lift
For ways to reach out and to give
We offer thanks and vow to live!

Family Time (Communion)

This is the place where you would insert the communion script I have written on the weeks when that is appropriate for your tradition. Again, adapt the language to fit your tradition. I always use the form from the 2nd c. Hippolytus document which has become an ecumenical standard. But I realize some of you may take a more informal tone. In that case, follow the form, use some of my language so you get the theme in there but put it in your own "voice." Do take a look at both versions–the words are the same but in one I use one of my favorite songs (although probably unfamiliar to many of you), "Take This Moment." In the other I use a much more familiar song to many, "Take Time to Be Holy" (the same song I've used as a suggestion for use as the children come forward earlier in the service).

Taking it Out

The final movement of our service is a time of committing to take a bit of this serenity and peace out into the busy world. We are reminded to "keep the main thing the main thing."

Closing Song

Again, I give suggestions for traditional/classic worship and for more contemporary but feel free to choose differently based on your congregation's repertoire, utilizing the theological criteria I list below the song choices.

Blessing for the Unhurried Life

I've written a benediction for each service. The first part is different depending on the theme of the day and the second part is repeated each week. See if you can try to memorize that part so you can say it while looking into the eyes of the people. The third verse of our theme song follows as the acolyte takes the light out into the world. Here is the first week's benediction:

May the tempo of your journey
be "just right."

May you seize the day,
but also savor the moment.
May your life be the one you live
and not just watch passing by.

And may you be reacquainted each day
with an unhurried God
who is calling you to dive deeply into love.

[short four measure intro, then sung by all, more uptempo, sweeping]

In the Spirit let us travel, open to each other's pain,
Let our loves and fears unravel, celebrate the space we gain:
There's a place for deepest dreaming, there's a time for heart to care,
In the Spirit's lively scheming there is always room to spare.

Words for the theme song, "Come and Find the Quiet Center" by Shirley Erena Murray. If you don't have a hymnal with this song in it, you'll want to make sure you have OneLicense.net that covers the use of these words. Tune: BEACH SPRING (public domain)

Postlude

I hope this helps you get an at-a-glance feel for the scripts!

See the synopses for every worship experience in the series HERE

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