

Excellence in the Assembly

I. Introduction

- A. In our service for God, we should strive for excellence in all we do
- B. We should strive for excellence in our assemblies
- C. A picture of excellence should be formed not merely by pragmatic concerns, but first and foremost by God's will as revealed in scripture.

II. Keep in mind the unique purpose of the assembly

- A. Worship is an activity in our assemblies, but is not the primary purpose
 - 1. Jn 4:12 - Worship is not tied to a place
 - 2. Rom 12:1 - One can worship anywhere at any time
- B. 1 Cor 14:26 - All things are to be done for edification in our assemblies
- C. Mutual edification through congregational worship practices is the unique purpose of our assembly

III. Assemblies⁶ in the New Testament

- A. Acts 2:42-47
 - 1. Continually devoted
 - a. To the Apostle's teaching - The teachings of Christ, the word
 - b. To the Fellowship
 - 1) They were together
 - 2) They had all things in common
 - 3) Selling possession to meet each other's needs
 - 4) Meeting together in the temple
 - 5) Meeting together from house to house
 - c. To Breaking of The Bread
 - 1) They had meals in home
 - 2) But in v.42 literally says "to the breaking of the bread"⁷
 - a) Unlike verse 46, this seems to be more than just a common meal together
 - b) This may be a reference to communion
 - d. To the Prayers

⁶ The New Testament always uses the word "assembly," and never uses the word, "worship service"

⁷ τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου

- 1) Literally it is "to the prayers"
- 2) Seems to refer to some type of liturgical prayer
 - a) This early on, it may be prayers from synagogue assemblies
 - b) Many elements of synagogue assemblies continued in Christian assemblies
2. The word "the" which appears before each item in v.42
 - a. Seems to indicate a pattern for worship that included these as an integral part of every assembly
 - b. They were continually "devoted" to these
3. Considerations for worship leaders - priority to each of these:
 - a. Devoted to the word
 - 1) Ensure the word is presented well
 - 2) Read scripture creatively and with honor
 - 3) Remind the congregation God speaks to them through the word
 - b. Devoted to the fellowship
 - 1) Ensure there is opportunity for fellowship
 - 2) Remind congregation of the priority of fellowship
 - 3) In contributions, let people know what they are giving to and participating in
 - 4) Share with the congregation news, feedback , etc. from ministries they help support
 - c. Devoted to the communion
 - 1) Be thoughtful in preparation for communion
 - 2) Ensure this doesn't become a thoughtless ritual
 - 3) Remind the congregation of the meaning of communion and its centrality in our lives
 - d. Devoted to the prayer
 - 1) Give priority to prayer
 - 2) Try to avoid worn out and meaningless ritual
 - 3) Set aside sufficient time for prayer

B. 1 Corinthians 14

1. Emphasis on Edification
 - a. Purpose of the assembly is to edify believers
 - Emphasis is not on worship
 - Emphasis is on edification
 - b. Edification comes through worship together
 - c. We sing and pray with the spirit and with the understanding
 - Both our mind and our heart is engaged
 - It is not mindless nor is it spiritless

- d. We respond with the Amen
 - The Amen, a tradition going back to synagogue worship
 - When someone worded a thanksgiving, the congregation would respond with an "Amen"
 - e. There is an awareness of guests
 - Do not want guests to be unaware of what is happening
 - Want guests not just to be welcome, but also convicted
 - This happens through the teaching and understanding of the word of God
 - f. There are multiple teachers
 - Not limited to only one teacher
 - There are to be several who speak in the assembly
 - g. Group participation
 - At one point, a comparison is made between all speaking in tongues vs all prophesying
 - If you use prophecy, not as a special gift or office, but in the more general sense of telling the word of God, one way "all" can prophesy is through congregational singing⁸
 - Each was encouraged to come with something to contribute
 - Everyone was to pass judgment, or weigh carefully what said
 - h. Decently in order
 - Each person, whether he has a Psalm, teaching, revelation, a thanksgiving, etc. goes one at a time
 - This allows all to hear and to be edified
 - i. Male leadership
 - Women were not to "pass judgment" (v.29)
 - Women were not to be a speaker (v.34)
2. Considerations for worship leaders
- a. Ensure there is a focus on edification
 - Don't get caught up in entertainment, outreach
 - Don't get stuck in dead, meaningless rituals
 - b. Ensure people understand
 - Make sure they understand the meaning of songs
 - Explain hard to understand words in scriptures and in the songs
 - c. Give and encourage opportunities to respond in some way
 - The "Amen"
 - Sharing thanksgivings, praises, prayer needs, etc.
 - Opportunity to respond with commitment, repentance, conversion, etc.

⁸ Apparently, prophecy and music were associated at one time (1 Chr 25:1-3; 1 Sam 10:5, 10-12; 19:20-24), which might explain why prophetic oracles were usually written in poetic lines.

- d. Be aware of the guest
 - Try to avoid a lot of Christian "jargon" or explain it
 - Ensure that the guest will be able to hear, or "overhear" the message in a meaningful way
- e. Provide ways for everyone to participate and contribute in the assembly
 - Congregational singing that includes everyone
 - Share people's prayer victories
 - Encourage the "Amen"
- f. Use multiple teachers who are male
 - Avoid limiting all the assembly being led by one person
 - Multiple people for communion meditation, prayers, song leading, etc.
 - Even the teaching of the word can involve multiple teachers
- g. Ensure everything is decent and orderly
 - The assembly should have a plan clear to all
 - Even if an assembly is informal, it should still be planned

C. James 2:2-4

- 1. Hospitality in the assembly
 - a. Avoid showing favoritism
 - 1) Avoid showing preference to the rich guest
 - 2) Avoid showing indifference or dishonor to the poor guest
 - 3) It is a sin to show partiality
 - b. Be welcoming and hospitable to guests
 - 1) We live according to the law of liberty
 - 2) We are freed from superficial distinctions
 - 3) We are to show mercy
- 2. Conclusion for worship leaders
 - a. Be warm and open to all, especially the least of these
 - b. Show value and honor to guests
 - c. Be ready for guests, physically and emotionally

D. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

- 1. The Contribution
 - a. The passage does not mention specifically an assembly
 - b. v.3-4 - Indicates this was a special contribution for a specific purpose
 - c. The passage instructs contributions on the first day of the

week

- 1) This was convenient to avoid "collections"
 - 2) This was appropriate because the contribution is an expression of Christian fellowship
 - a) 2 Cor 8:4 refers to contributions as a fellowship⁹
 - b) One of the activities of Christian assemblies fellowship, as seen in Acts 2:42
 - c) This wasn't just individuals bringing an offering to God, but also Christian fellowship
 - d. Even after the "special collection" was concluded, the practice of taking a general collection for ministry continued¹⁰
2. Conclusion for worship leaders
- a. Time should be set aside in the assembly for the collection
 - b. Because the collection is an expression of Christian fellowship, the congregation should be reminded of what they are participating in through the contribution

IV. Acts & features of our assemblies not mentioned in these passages

A. The facilities

1. There are items that are part of the facilities
 - a. Furnishings
 - b. Seating arrangement
 - c. Lighting
 - d. Temperature
 - e. Décor
 - f. Aids, such as songbooks
 - g. Technology
 - h. Other _____
2. Considerations for worship leaders
 - a. The facilities should be conducive to the purposes for the assembly and not detract from it
 - b. Consider ways to improve facilities if needed

B. Greeters

1. Greeters help to welcome and introduce guests and the

⁹ In Greek, the word is *koinonia*, and is often translated, "fellowship, participation, or sharing."

¹⁰ Early writers from the first three centuries included the offering as a regular part of their assemblies. One example is from Justin Martyr, "...And on the day called Sunday there is a gathering together ... Those who have means and are willing, each according to his own choice, gives what he wills, and what is collected is deposited ..." - From Justin Martyr's *Apology I:67*.

congregation to each other

James 2:2-4 instructs congregations to welcome and honor guests who come to the assembly

2. Considerations

- a. Greeters should be attentive to guests and questions they might have
- b. Greeters give one of the first impressions guests will have of the congregation

C. Opening

1. There are many ways to "open" the assembly

- a. With an encouraging song
- b. With a scripture reading
- c. With a prayer or praise
- d. With words of welcome and introduction or call to worship
- e. Other _____

2. Considerations

- a. Scripture nowhere speaks of a "worship service"
 - 1) It is always called the "assembly, congregation, or church"
 - 2) Scripture paints a picture of the assembly as a time for mutual edification and encouragement
- b. The opening should be suited to the purpose for the assembly
- c. The opening should be aware of guests in the assembly

D. Closing

1. There are many ways to close an assembly

- a. With a song
- b. With a scripture
- c. With a prayer
- d. Other _____

2. Considerations

- a. The "close" should be suited to the purpose of the assembly
- b. If the purpose is to edify, then the close should end on an edifying high note

E. Announcements

1. This is often thought of as a necessary evil

- It is for many the least favorite part of the assembly

2. Considerations

- a. Announcements should be suited to the purpose of the assembly
 - 1) How can announcements be edifying?
 - 2) Announcements should be shared with enthusiasm
- b. Announcements can be edifying
 - 1) Missions news
 - 2) News from brethren around the world
 - 3) An encouraging anecdote connected to a news item
 - 4) A reminder of a news item of how this pleases God or encourages us
 - 5) Other _____

F. Invitation

- 1. The origin of the "invitation" is the "altar calls" of the 19th century and early 20th century revivals
- 2. Considerations:
 - a. Invitation songs ought to fit the invitation message
 - b. The invitation method ought to fit the audience
 - 1) Many no longer "go forward," but may have questions
 - 2) Some may need further personal guidance

V. Self Reflection: How Are We Doing?

Use the chart below for reflection and feedback on the various parts of the assembly mentioned in the passages above

Assembly Excellence Feedback

1-Very Poor	2-Poor	3-Average	4-Good	5-Excellent	
The Teaching of the Word					Total: _____
1. The teaching is Bible based					1 2 3 4 5
2. The teaching is understandable					1 2 3 4 5
3. The teaching edifies and encourages growth in godliness in daily life					1 2 3 4 5
The Fellowship					Total: _____
1. There is opportunity for fellowship in the assemblies					1 2 3 4 5
2. Fellowship is given priority alongside doctrine, breaking of bread, and prayer					1 2 3 4 5
3. Giving is understood as an expression of fellowship					1 2 3 4 5
The Prayers					Total: _____
1. Prayers are meaningful					1 2 3 4 5
2. Prayer content represents the congregation as a whole					1 2 3 4 5
3. Priority is given to prayer					1 2 3 4 5
Communion, the breaking of bread					Total: _____
1. Communion is in remembrance of Christ					1 2 3 4 5
2. Communion is understood as an expression fellowship together with Christ					1 2 3 4 5
3. Communion is given priority					1 2 3 4 5
Singing					Total: _____
1. Singing edifies and helps to strengthen Christian faith					1 2 3 4 5
2. The words and messages of the songs are understood					1 2 3 4 5
3. The song are ones that all can easily sing together					1 2 3 4 5
Group Participation					Total: _____
1. The assembly appropriates multiple teachers and worship leaders					1 2 3 4 5
2. Each member is a perceptive contributor to mutual edification and not merely a passive onlooker					1 2 3 4 5
3. The members respond with the "Amen," understanding that this means both agreement and submission to what is taught					1 2 3 4 5
Decently In Order					Total: _____
1. The order of the assembly is conducive to mutual edification					1 2 3 4 5
2. The facilities, furnishings, etc. enhance mutual edification					1 2 3 4 5
3. There is a logical progression in the assembly (eg: from teaching to response of praise or confession, etc.)					1 2 3 4 5
Hospitality and Attentiveness					Total: _____
1. There is a positive recognition of guests in the assembly					1 2 3 4 5
2. Guests of all kinds feel welcome					1 2 3 4 5
3. Guests can understand the message, songs, etc. in the assembly					1 2 3 4 5

Score Explanation

3-5 Very Poor

6-8 Poor

9-11 Average

12-14 Good

15 Excellent

What are possible causes and solutions?

VI. Discuss suggestions for improving assembly activities

A. The teaching of the Word

1. Scripture Reading

- a. This should have a prominent place in the assembly
 - 1) It is the word of God
 - 2) It is the foundation of edification
 - a) Heb 4:12 - It judges and discerns the heart
 - b) 2 Tim 3:16-17 - Scriptures equip us
 - c) Rev 1:3 - Both readers and hearers are blessed
 - d) 1 Tim 4:13 - Attention to public reading
- b. This is often the most poorly done part of the service
 - 1) Short passage, read in a monotone voice, trying to pronounce the words
 - 2) Sometimes the ones chosen to read are very young and can barely read aloud well
 - 3) What does all this say about how we view the importance of scripture?
- c. Suggestions
 - 1) Place a priority on excellence
 - 2) Have the congregation stand for the reading
 - 3) Include words such as, "The word of the Lord" or "Hear the word of God"
 - 4) Instead of being a prelude to something else, like the sermon, have the scripture reading as a stand alone part of the assembly
 - 5) Include readings from various parts of scriptures, such as the Psalms, Gospels, and Epistles.
 - 6) Periodically include responsive readings
 - 7) Read interpretively, giving attention to the message and the mood of the passage

2. The lesson

- a. The word preached has always been God's normal way of communicating his message to people
- b. Suggestions
 - 1) Ensure the sermon makes God's word understandable with suggestions on application
 - 2) Be aware of the congregation's attention span
 - 3) Be aware of who is in the pew, their background, level of understanding, daily challenges, etc
 - 4) Realize that the message does not have to be limited to a single speaker in the assembly
 - a) Elders can and should address the congregation
 - b) There may be times when one could have multiple speakers

B. The Fellowship

1. This is perhaps the least thought of aspect of Christian assembly
2. The fellowship was a priority in the early church, was not optional
3. The assembly and activities are expressions of fellowship
 - a. Singing together
 - b. Communion
 - c. Giving
4. Other expressions of one another fellowship
 - a. Hospitality and sharing with one another
 - b. Encouraging one another
 - c. Confession of sins to one another
5. Suggestions
 - a. Remind the congregation periodically of the beauty and importance of Christian fellowship
 - b. Remind the congregation that we are the body of Christ, the family of God, God's people, a holy nation, connected by the blood
 - c. Do not discourage greeting and visiting times, they are a part of the assembly too
 - d. Recognize that fellowship is not limited to the assembly time

C. The Prayers

1. Prayers in the assembly
 - a. Typically spontaneous
 - b. Usually will have anywhere from four to six token prayers in an assembly (opening, closing, communion bread, communion juice, offering)
 - c. Prayers typically are not stand alone prayers, but are to introduce a particular part of the assembly
2. Suggestions
 - a. Rather than having just token prayers, set aside a time to focus on prayer for the sake of prayer
 - b. Realize you are not praying for yourself, but you are representing the congregation in leading a prayer
 - c. Give thought ahead of time of what to pray for
 - 1) This helps avoid the rut of clichés
 - 2) This makes prayer more than just filling in the time with what pops into our head to ask for
 - 3) Some things you could include when appropriate:
 - a) The leaders of the government
 - b) Persecuted Christians
 - c) The lost
 - d) For wisdom and insight
 - e) Confession as a congregation
 - f) The desire to seek God

- g) Praises
- h) Submission
- i) Leaders, teachers, families, etc.
- c. Spend time regularly reading the prayers of the Bible
- d. Make prayer a lifestyle

D. The Breaking of Bread: Communion

1. Despite the rhetoric of it being central, it often receive little creative attention or preparation
 - a. It often becomes a ritual to perform out of duty
 - b. Some rush through it with little thought or comment
2. Communion in an unworthy manner is serious (1 Cor 11:27-32)
 - a. Can be a symptom or cause of spiritual sickness
 - b. Can bring judgment
 - c. It is important to ensure communion is done with excellence
3. Things to avoid
 - a. Doing communion less frequently to keep it more meaningful
 - 1) We do every other act weekly, why would you want to cut this one and not others?
 - 2) If daily kiss to wife has become too routine, you don't do it less, but put more energy and creativity in it
 - b. Doing something bizarre or theatrical to "liven it up"
 - 1) This will detract from the meaning of communion
 - 2) The purpose is not simply an "experience" but a meaningful communion
4. Some suggestions
 - a. Recognize that the "liturgy" is not set in stone
 - 1) The typical liturgy is this:
 - a) Communion song to "prepare our minds"
 - 1] Often unrelated to the rest of the service
 - 2] Song often a break with the flow
 - b) Scripture
 - c) Communion talk (not always done)
 - d) Prayer
 - e) Serving of communion by passing trays
 - 2) Other ways to prepare for communion
 - a) Make communion natural part of the flow of the service with songs, scriptures, etc.
 - b) Make the sermon rather than a song lead into communion
 - c) Make communion rather than the invitation the climax of the service
 - b. Strive for meaning in the communion talk, not length
 - 1) Focus on one point to meditate on
 - a) A multi-point sermon is hard to meditate on
 - b) If it takes longer than three minutes to say it,

- then it probably has more than one point
- 2) Focus on Christ as our host
 - a) This is communion together as a family
 - b) This is a time to commemorate Christ, especially his death and resurrection
- 3) Include scripture
 - This should be at the center of the meditation
- 4) Explain the significance of communion
 - a) This is a good reminder for members
 - b) This is also good for visitors to hear
- c. Vary the approach
 - 1) To keep from falling into a rut, the approach can be varied within practical and biblical limits
 - a) A variation should not be so distracting that it destroys the meaning of communion
 - b) Variations should enhance the meaning of communion
 - c) Explain it clearly to the congregation so as to eliminate confusion
 - 2) Some possible variations
 - a) Typical: Pass the trays and partake when you receive the trays
 - b) Variation: Pass the trays, hold the elements until all receive them and partake in unison
 - c) Approach the table and partake directly from the table itself
 - d) Have people speak to each other as they pass the trays, "The body of Christ," or "Until he comes" or something like this
- d. Pray thoughtfully
 - 1) Spontaneous prayers are not necessary
 - a) They seem more sincere and original
 - b) Remember there is nothing new under the sun
 - 2) Written prayers can avoid the clichés
 - 3) It is appropriate to include such things as
 - a) Thanksgiving
 - b) What God has done to save us
 - c) The atoning work of Christ
 - 1] His incarnation
 - 2] His death
 - 3] His resurrection
 - d) Words of remembrance
 - e) Words of commitment and renewal
 - f) Words of self examination
 - g) Praise
- e. Ensure the elements are in place

- 1) Someone should be in charge of preparing the actual elements for communion
- 2) They should be ready before the assembly begins

E. Singing

1. Most assemblies are very music driven in modern times
2. Perception of excellence is often connected to the quality of singing
3. Suggestions
 - a. Place importance on the need for training for song leaders
 - 1) Most expect training and a certain level of competency when it comes to preaching
 - 2) We should also expect it from song leaders
 - 3) Churches should invest resources for training opportunities for song leaders and the congregation
 - b. Attend to the whole spectrum of songs as appropriate
 - 1) There are various types of songs, each with a function
 - 2) Regular reading of the Psalms helps to tend to this
 - a) Songs and even hymnals ought to be evaluated at least partially according to the book of Psalms
 - b) Remember the book of Psalms is the only inspired song book
 - 3) Types of songs include songs such as¹¹
 - a) Praise songs
 - b) Worship songs
 - c) Petition songs
 - d) Encouragement songs
 - e) Songs of lament
 - f) Thanksgiving songs
 - g) Lament songs
 - 4) Functions of singing include¹²
 - a) Teaching one another
 - b) Admonishing one another
 - c) Making melody with your heart to the Lord
 - d) Praising God
 - e) Thanksgiving to God
 - c. Ensure the singing edifies or builds up
 - 1) Distinguish between edification and entertainment
 - 2) Recognize that there are some songs that may require explanation in order to be understood
 - 3) Acquire feedback
 - d. Attend to all dimensions of the singing
 - 1) Biblical dimension - The message of the song
 - 2) Technical dimension - The music

¹¹ All of these types of songs are found in the book of Psalms

¹² Some of the passages that reflect the functions of various songs include: Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; Heb 13:15; James 5:13; 1 Chr 16:4-5; 25:1.

- 3) Emotional dimension - Attention to the emotional message and leading accordingly
- e. There is more in the chapter on song leading and planning a song service

F. Group Participation

- 1. Many do not think of group participation in a "worship service"
 - a. The typical arrangement seems to suggest more of being a recipient than a participant
 - b. Many think of the people in the pews as the "audience"
- 2. Suggestions
 - a. Periodically remind the congregation they are participants
 - b. Encourage the "Amen" response
 - c. Encourage those with something edifying to arrange to share it with the congregation in some way
 - 1) If they are male, they can arrange to share a word of edification from a scripture
 - 2) They can share a song or hymn that is meaningful and edifying
 - 3) They can share a prayer victory, something they learned, etc.
 - 4) If they are female, they can talk to a worship leader, elder, preacher, etc. about them passing on something edifying

G. Decently in Order

- 1. The activities in the assembly ought to be planned and orderly
 - a. Keep in mind, this does not mean dead and lifeless
 - b. Keep in mind that orderly does not mean the order is set in stone, but it can be varied in an orderly way
- 2. Suggestions
 - a. Have a printed order of worship
 - b. Plan the assembly ahead of time
 - c. Ensure everyone knows what they are doing and when
 - d. Ensure the facilities, technology, etc. are all ready

F. Hospitality and Attentiveness

- 1. Guests should be treated honorably in the assembly
- 2. Suggestions
 - a. Don't assume guests know what to do
 - b. Give clear instructions about song books, communion, the nursery, etc.
 - c. Try to avoid jargon, and if you do, explain it
 - d. Recognize and welcome guests warmly
 - e. Take a personal interest in guests

VII. Other considerations in the assembly

A. Facilities

1. The design and arrangements of "church buildings" has a long tradition and history
 - a. The first buildings were modeled after the Roman basilica
 - b. Church buildings were perhaps influenced as much by cultural forces as much as biblical ones
 - c. Keep in mind that the design of a building both reflects and shapes your values and your theology
 - 1) Puritan meeting houses vs. Cathedral
 - 2) How is the building laid out?
 - 3) What are the prominent features in the building?
 - 4) What kind of décor is in the building?
 - d. This is difficult to change and improve
 - 1) It has the greatest amount of expense
 - 2) Whether conducive to biblical purposes or not, what is "normal" for building design becomes "instinctive"
2. Suggestions
 - a. Consider the purposes of the assembly and let it dictate the layout and design of your facilities
 - b. Evaluate seating arrangement, furnishings, room layout, technology, etc. against biblical purposes

B. Greeters

1. Be warm and attentive
2. Take the time to learn something about guests
3. Communicate welcome to guests and introduce them to people
4. Ensure guests know where to go

C. Opening

1. Remember that the opening sets the mood for the assembly
2. Be aware of the guests, welcome and give clear instructions
3. Ensure the opening reminds the people why we are here either directly or indirectly

D. Closing

1. Almost always, the closing involves a song and prayer
2. Suggestions
 - a. Try to have a strong and encouraging closing
 - 1) If closing with a song, it ought to be an encouraging song (eg: "God bless you God with God"
 - 2) Remember that this is the last word before sending them back into the world

- b. A service can close with a blessing by a leader
 - 1) Historically, it has been called a "benediction," from the Latin word for blessing
 - 2) This fits in with the purpose of edification
 - 3) This helps to encourage and strengthen the congregation before going back into the world
 - 4) A blessing might sound like - "May the Lord bless you this week, and may he watch over and strengthen you."

E. Announcements

- 1. Ensure announcements are in good logical order
- 2. Make sure they are written
- 3. Include things such as missions news, cards, etc.
- 4. Be enthusiastic
- 5. Remember that announcements are not a necessary evil, but another means of sharing, fellowship, and edification

F. The "invitation"

- 1. In terms of Christian history, this is a new innovation
 - a. It began in the revivals New England and of the frontier
 - b. It was accompanied with songs that had been written specifically to appeal to those who needed conversion or repentance
 - 1) Designed to create an emotional appeal to the heart
 - 2) Many came forward to be saved
 - c. These became the "altar calls" of the regular assemblies in churches
- 2. Pitfalls and problems of the way a traditional "invitation" is done
 - a. Expectation
 - 1) The invitation is usually at the tail end of the service
 - 2) As the preacher closes the sermon, everyone gets their song books at starts to get all their things together
 - 3) The one wanting to respond knows it is the end of the service and that many want to get to lunch
 - 4) Is it the best policy to tack an "altar call" at the end of the service without sufficient time allotted for it in the assembly?
 - b. Blocked aisle
 - 1) A newcomer is at the service and wants to respond
 - 2) He is in the middle of the pew and is blocked in and can't get out
 - 3) Is good to have people standing when offering the invitation that makes it harder for people to get to the aisle?
 - c. Uncomfortable silence
 - 1) The singing has stopped and the preacher is leaning

- forward to listen to the needs of those who came forward
- 2) Several have come forward and patiently wait for the preacher to get to them
- 3) They sit nervously by themselves in the awkward silence
- 4) They try to explain their needs while the preacher makes a mental note of what everyone says, hoping to get it all right
- 5) Is this the best way to do this?
- d. Possible need for counsel
 - 1) A guest has come forward for the invitation to be saved
 - 2) The preacher does not know anything about this person, and tries to become more acquainted with him and his situation on the front pew before proceeding
 - 3) Is the front pew the best place for this?
 - 4) Is this the way to deal with something as life changing as one's salvation and relationship with God?
- e. Changing room
 - 1) Someone has come for baptism and is directed toward the changing room
 - 2) He is unfamiliar with the garments, how to change and put them on, the baptism procedure, where to go, etc.
 - 3) Is there a better way?
- f. Singing
 - 1) During the time of preparation for the baptism, the congregation sits awkwardly
 - 2) Someone jumps up and starts leading random songs
 - 3) Someone signals that they are ready, and he sits down
 - 4) After the baptism he leads more songs
 - 5) Is there a way to improve this? Is this the only way?
- 3. Suggestions
 - a. Provide response cards in each pew with instructions
 - 1) These can be given to the preacher or an elder
 - 2) These can be placed in a "response box"
 - 3) These can also be brought with the respondent as he responds to a traditional invitation
 - b. Have the group of elders greet people as they come forward
 - 1) This eliminates the "wait" for the preacher if multiple people come forward
 - 2) This eliminates sitting alone
 - 3) This allows the elder to tend to one person and to be more attentive
 - 4) Instead of sharing what multiple people have told you when they came forward, you can share what the one person told you, eliminating confusion and getting it

wrong

- c. Have room available if need to go talk more or more counsel is needed
 - 1) This eliminates having to do this on the front pew
 - 2) This could be done at any time, not just during the "invitation"
- d. Encourage a response from all people
 - 1) Don't limit the invitation to unbelievers
 - 2) Encourage Christians who want to be more devoted to also respond
 - 3) Seeing people respond helps motivate others to respond as well
- e. Allow for questions and answers
 - 1) This could be done on a card
 - 2) There could be a Q & A period after the sermon