

the worship leader field guide

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FELLOW

28 Ways to Create Great Segues

jon nicol

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Acknowledgements

Big thanks to Angie Land for the compiling and editing, and Paula Jones for the layout.

Thanks also to my worship teams & pastors at Tiffin Alliance, Reynoldsburg Alliance and Heartland Church for allowing me to try this stuff out.

And huge thanks to my wife Shannon for putting up with my head buried in my Mac as I edited this resource.

Before You Read This...

Worship Flow: 28 Ways to Create Great Segues was originally a series of blog posts on WorshipTeamCoach.com. You can read through this resource front to back, but it's really designed to be more of a reference guide. The chapters are standalone for the most part, but at times will refer back to earlier sections.

Since this resource is in a binder, it will be easy to share with your pastor or members of your team. Please feel free to make and distribute as many copies as you need within your local church ministry.

One final word before you dive in...

These original blog posts were written in the early days of WorshipTeamCoach.com. As I prepared this resource, reading through my early blog posts was a tad painful. I appreciate Angie Land for doing the hard work to compile, edit and proof these posts. More than once Angie wrote in the notes: "this does not make sense." You're right, Angie, it does not.

So while these posts have been edited, tweaked and edited some more to get rid of the most cringe-worthy moments, there's still a sense of my early writing here. Also, some of the songs and cultural references I updated, some I did not. I hope that's OK for you. To rewrite this material completely would most likely mean this resource would not be released at all.

And, now since this book is about segues, I need a nice transition to the introduction...

Ummm....

I got nothing. Here's the introduction:

Introduction: Transitions Happen

The worship team ends the song.

A smattering of applause from the congregation.

Singers are smiling.

The band looks at the acoustic guitar player.

The acoustic guitar player looks at the keyboard player.

The keyboard player gives him a twitch of the head that says, "You're playing the intro, not me."

The singers continue smiling, but now are glancing over their shoulder to see who's starting the next song.

The guitarist shuffles his charts around and gives the worship leader the universal "Just one moment" sign with his right index finger.

The worship leader wants to give him back a universal sign of his own, but instead says to the congregation, "Let's move into a time of prayer."

That took far longer to read than it did to take place. But if you've ever been a part of a moment like that, especially as a worship leader, it felt like you could have clocked it with a sundial.

Transitions happen. Song to song. Music to preaching. Prayer to offering. They happen. And they can happen just how they happen, or they can happen according to a plan. An unplanned transition is at best a speed bump; at its worst it's a train wreck. When we don't plan a transition, we put a period in where a comma should be. Or a gasp where a gentle inhaled breath should be. Or a fence instead of a gate. Or, well, you get the picture.

The Unplanned Transition: "And Now, Let's Take the Offering..."

An unplanned transition can cause a screeching halt to your service. But more often, the unplanned transition will result in an off-the-cuff attempt at continued forward motion. Frequently it's just a verbal cue from the pastor or worship leader such as, "And at this time, we are going to collect the offering."

Sure, it gets the job done, but I am wondering if there's a better way to move people through the experiences of a worship gathering.

The Unplanned Transition: A Bone

Look at it this way: I've got a great skeleton. It's held me up for over 30 years. It's been broken a half a dozen times or so, but those were pretty much all my fault. Skateboards, jungle gyms, bike meets curb. By sixth grade, the ER staff knew my name. So my skeleton is a good one, but I don't want to see it. If I do see it, other than through an X-ray, something is really wrong. And you can bet that I will be a little preoccupied with that particular bone sticking out of my body.

That's what a poorly planned transition does. It distracts people with an exposed bone (albeit much less gross and icky). It abruptly calls attention to *how* we are moving to a new element, versus focusing on *what* the element is. It plucks us out of the moment created by the previous element and plops us into a new one. I don't know about you, but I don't want "plucked" or "plopped" to be action verbs of my worship service (unless it's Jesus doing the plucking and plopping. In that case, just hold on).

So transitions happen, but intentional planning helps us create a seamless movement from experience to experience. I refer to planned transitions as segues. You can still create a bad segue, but the odds for a smoother transition exponentially increase when some thought is put into it.

In this resource, we'll be looking at several different segues that cover various elements of the service. This isn't an exhaustive list, but hopefully it will get your wheels turning about different methods to make great transitions in your worship service.

Musical Segues

Segue #3-Song to Song, Same Key; Non-Sequential Start

A non-sequential start? OK, it's just a fancy, made-up way to say, "go from the ending of one song to an internal section (like a chorus or bridge) of another song." For example, let's say you're moving from "My Jesus I Love Thee" in E to "Here I Am to Worship" in E. The whole song of "My Jesus I Love Thee" lines up thematically with "Here I Am to Worship", but there's something special about the second verse. Think about moving from the lines...

I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow / If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now

...into a quiet, maybe even rubato rendering of the bridge of "Here I Am to Worship."

I'll never know how much it costs / to see my sin upon that cross.

Not only does this create a seamless segue from one song to another, but it allows people to experience the lyrics of each song in a new way as they are brought together.

Moving from the end of one song to an internal section of a song works best when you can match thoughts or concepts from song to song like we just saw. Here are a few other examples of matching the end of one song with an internal section of another:

- "Be Thou My Vision" (traditional hymn) to "You Are My King" (Billy Foote). The final verse of "Be Thou My Vision" is speaking to the High King. Move right from there to the bridge of "You Are My King" (the "You are my King" section). Both can be done in E. To create more dynamics, I do "Be Thou" in Eb for the first 3 verses and modulate to E for the final.

- "Holy, Holy, Holy" (in E, or start in D and play the last verse in E) to the chorus of Chris Tomlin's "We Fall Down."

God, in three Persons, blessed Trinity ... and we cry holy, holy, holy...

An update: Since my church rarely uses "We Fall Down" anymore, I've found moving from the end of Holy, Holy, Holy (key of D) into the chorus of Great I Am (key of D). I tag the last line of the hymn, *God in three Persons, blessed Trinity...* and instead of ending on a D, I end on a Bm and begin playing and singing the chorus from Great I Am. To make feel right, I just leave out the *hallelujah* and start singing on the *holy, holy* part. Play with that one. It can be really effective.

From that new starting point, determine the best arrangement of the second song. You can also use this segue with songs of different keys, but you will want to make sure you have a smooth modulation to the key of the new song. That's where we'll pick up in the next chapter.

In this first chapter, we looked at three different ways to get from one song to the next within the same key. Now we start looking at moving from one key to another.

Non-Musical Segues

Over the last few chapters, we were looking primarily at musical transitions. These next six non-musical segues are designed to go from song to song, into a song from a non-musical element, or out of a song to non-musical element.

Segue #10: The Count-In

Uno, dos, tres, cuatro!, or the English version, is sometimes all the segue you need from one song to the next.

This is especially effective when you have cultivated the last segue (the clap offering). As the applause is dying down, the drummer can click off a four count with his sticks or on his high hat. Even if there is no clapping, that simple count-in will be enough to give the feeling of transition from one song to another. When it comes to the count-in, here are some things to think about:

Who's counting in?

In a perfect world, the drummer is. In that same perfect world, he's marked the beats-per-minute (BPM) for each song and might even have a metronome handy to make sure he's got the tempo down. At a previous church I served at, I could throw out a random BPM to one of my drummers, and he'd click it off faster than I could enter it in to my metronome. He was always spot on, and a little freakish.

If you think your drummer may not be the best to count your band in, give that duty to your lead musician or music director, the person that the rest of the team looks to. That's probably you. So don't be afraid to count out loud with some confidence.

Does every song need a count-in? No. Here's a good rule of thumb for count-ins: if the whole band is starting at once, you NEED a solid count-in. For songs starting with only one instrument, likely a guitar or piano, a count-in usually isn't needed. (Exception: if your player doesn't have the tempo internalized, then letting him start the song could likely be the precursor to a slow train wreck or a fast plunge off a cliff. In that case, count him in.)

Is it always 1,2,3,4? Not necessarily. If you are in 3/4 time, you certainly don't want to count-off in 4/4 time. Even if you are in 4, you often don't need all four beats. Counting two beats (3,4) is often adequate to communicate the tempo. This is especially effective when only two instruments are starting together, like the acoustic guitarist and the drummer.

How soon should the count-in start? If there will be no applause or any other segue element, you probably need to start the count-in before the last song dies out. Allow the last note or beat of the song to ring. As the rest of the band is holding out their last note, the drummer can begin to count in the new song. It will feel like a seamless transition.

Among all the different segues we have looked at, this is probably one of the simplest. Just remember, there are three kinds of people in this world: those who can count, and those who can't. (Did you catch that? It was joke...*three* kinds of people...*never mind*.)

[An Update]

Since writing this original blog post, I've transitioned my team to using in-ear monitors and a click track. Some say that squashes the flow, or creativity, or even the Holy Spirit. But they have the right to make spiritualized excuses as to why their band doesn't play in time together.

OK, that was a tad harsh. Sorry.

Contrary to the naysayers, I've found the constraints of the click track to be freeing. But the click does add an extra element to deal with during this transition. Fortunately, my drummers have are on it and can start and stop the click between crashes and kicks. It's like they have a third arm.

Segue #11: The Prayer

Okay, time for true confessions: in the not too distant past, I told my team's vocal leader for that week to throw in a prayer between two songs. Our sparse band that week didn't allow for another musician to handle the introduction, and I had a capo and a patch change that would've created too much dead space. I try to plan for things like this, but I missed it.

Let me get this out there first: corporate prayer isn't a segue. It's a crucial part of our worship experience. Time should be allotted for it. Planning should be put into both *what* is prayed and *how* it's prayed. And we should be open for left turns that the Holy Spirit prompts for our public prayers. But as we plan the rhythm and flow of our worship gatherings, prayer can effectively bridge two songs.

When it comes to using prayer as a bridge (and not abusing it as a space filler), here are a few prayer personalities to avoid.

The Over Pray-er. This can either be in frequency or length. For some it's easy to pray before, after, and during songs. And for some over pray-ers, getting them to pray a brief prayer is like getting the *aurora borealis* to shine in Texas.

The Intimate Pray-er. This is the person who closes his eyes and all others disappear, just him and God. Not a bad place to be as a worshiper, but as a leader, and especially leading public prayer, the congregation is going to feel a little left out.

The Lyric Pray-er. "Lord, we lift your name on high, Lord, we love to sing your praises, we're so glad you're in our lives, we're so glad you came to save us." The words are great. The truth is there. But most of the time, reiterating several lines of song lyrics just sounds contrived.

I think the key to bridging songs with prayer is *intentionality*. We need to think through what song preceded the prayer and what song or songs are coming. We should ask ourselves:

- *What kind of prayer should be prayed here? Adoration? Supplication? Confession? A brief prayer between songs shouldn't try to cover all the bases, but focus on one aspect of approaching God.*
- *What will draw the congregation in and allow them to participate in this prayer?*

Honestly, I think the way pastors and other leaders lead out in prayer is one of the most disengaging acts during corporate worship (Oh wait, I forgot about the announcements. Okay, second most disengaging act). If our congregations are full of experienced prayer warriors who have learned to engage and agree while someone else is praying, then we're okay. But most people, I would guess, check out sometime between, "O Gracious Heavenly Father" and "in Jesus' Name, Amen". Maybe it's spiritual immaturity. Maybe it's cultural ADD. Maybe it's just me.

As much as we try to engage people in singing, what if we tried to engage them in prayer, even for a brief moment between songs? This topic deserves a whole chapter (and probably a book) to flesh out. But it's something for us to think about as we insert prayer into our services.

Lastly, when it comes to using prayer as a bridge between songs, consider lightly underscoring it with a piano or keyboard, or a guitar. Some call it a musical bed. Others call it noodling. Whatever you call it, it helps carry people from the song through the prayer and into the next song. You may want to revisit some of the earlier chapters that discussed musical segues between songs for ideas on what to play during the prayer.

Segue #15: The Offering

Part I

"We'll be taking the offering in a few moments." (Hint to ushers: please come to the front)

Some off-the-cuff announcements, then, "And now, as the ushers come forward, we'll be giving our tithes and offering." (Hint to ushers, *please* come to the front.)

Pause. The pastor looks back to see the one usher give the sideways head jerk to two other ushers still in their seats.

"Alright, AS THE USHERS COME FORWARD, let's prayer for our tithes and offerings." (A slightly stronger hint.)

Pause, as the ushers come forward.

They've arrived. The pastor's chest starts to untighten just a little. "Let's pray."

When it comes to a transition in worship, each additional person that is involved increases the chance for derailment. *Exponentially*. The segue to the offering is one of those transitions. Here are all the potential people involved:

- The music/worship leader ending the song
- The pastor or elder stepping up to pray for the offering
- The worship tech turning on the pulpit mic or pastor's wireless
- The ushers
- Whatever element you're using to fill the time as the plates are passed. If you have video, then you have worship techs to depend on. For a musical element, you'll have to factor in the soloists, band, and/or accompaniment tracks.

With all those moving parts, it's no wonder that for so many churches, this is the segment that grinds momentum to a halt. Here are some ideas to create smoother movement in and out of the offering.

Script out your services

The offering is something that most pastors have done for so long, they don't think that a script is needed. But any segue in or out of a service element, especially as one that involves as many people as the offering does, needs to be planned carefully. A few thoughts about scripts:

- The act of writing it out is at least 75% of the work. It forces you to think through all the details.
- Get other eyes on it before finalizing it. Ever forgotten to put in the dismissal for kids church? Your kids' ministry leader or a mother of preschoolers would have caught it.
- Put it in the hands of everyone involved. And put their names in the area for which they are responsible.

Keep a musical bed going throughout the segue.

Rather than stop playing at the end of the song, the guitar or keys can underscore the verbal transition and prayer to the offering. The musical bed, while hardly noticed by most, will be a constant thread through the preceding song, the prayer for the offering, and into the next element.

Keep comments brief and focused on the offering

Often pastors and lay leaders will use this time to add or augment announcements. If you want to keep a worshipful flow into and out of the offering, take the advice of Red Leader: "Cut the chatter, Red Two." (Sorry, inner Star Wars geek leaking out.)

Prep your ushers

These are good guys just waiting to be told what to do, and willing to do it. Don't wait till the prayer before the offering to give them instructions. Also, create a default mode for them that will work 99% of the time. For instance, instruct them that they should be getting into place during the song (or whatever the element is) before the offering. As the pastor or leader steps up to pray, they walk forward. No verbal cues needed.

Cue up whatever is next

Whether you are watching a video, singing another worship song, or having a special number, make sure that element is ready to launch as soon as the prayer finishes. Again, keeping that musical bed going until this next element will further connect the pieces.

In the next chapter, we'll continue talking about how to make great segues in and out of the offering, and even ideas on how to do the offering in a way that creates flow.

Vision & Mission

Segue #16: Using Segues to Communicate Vision & Mission

Vision and mission are two big buzz words that keep buzzing. They sometimes take on new form or variation like *purpose*. And they all get attached to a *statement*. At worst, a church's vision/mission/purpose statement is ripped off from another church and then slapped on a banner or bulletin cover. At their best, these statements offer clarity about the heartbeat of the church.

This chapter won't deal with the differences of mission, vision and all that. What I want to say about it is this: if you got it, flaunt it. And here's a place to flaunt it: your segues.

If you are moving towards the offering, say something like, "Here at Trendy Metaphor Community Church, we believe God has called us to [rattle off mission/vision statement, without sounding canned]. The money you give helps us to fund [name one or two specific ministries/events/initiatives, etc.]. Thanks for giving to help change lives."

Something in your mission statement likely points towards worshiping God with our whole heart and life. So tie that in to calling people to worship. At a previous church, we had a simple mission statement: *Love God, love others, live to serve*. So inviting people into our corporate worship would go something like this, "One of our primary missions is to love God. Through worshiping Him and experiencing His love, we are able to go out to love and serve others."

This isn't rocket science. But a few extra minutes of prep during your worship serving planning can make a difference. Reread the chapter on talking transitions for other ideas on how to approach a verbal segue.

Andy Stanley says it best: "Vision leaks." You need to keep repeating and reinforcing vision in multiple ways for people to remember it and engage with it. Your worship segues are a great way to do this.

Segue #28: The Introduction

For the last few chapters of the segue series, we have focused on segues to the sermon. I've suggested video, music, scripture, prayer, pyrotechnics and origami demonstrations. Okay, so we didn't use the last two, but those would be really cool. Unless you did them on the same Sunday. Then it's just a fire hazard.

For the final segue to the message (and overall final segue, unless I go past this randomly chosen number of 28), we're going to talk about the *Introduction*.

This is the oldest segue known to man. When the population of the earth doubled during a nap, it was an introduction that segued history:

God: *Adam, while you were asleep, I made you something.*

Adam: *Awesome, God, what is it? And why does my side feel funky?*

God: *Oh, um, I think you slept on it wrong. Never mind that. I'd like you to meet Eve.*

Adam: *Whoa, dude!*

God: *Actually, wo-man. Now go try out the "Be Fruitful and Multiply" app I installed in you two. It's better than Angry Birds.*

And thus began the first (and only) relationship on earth that did not involve head games. At least for a while.

Here are some reasons to use an introduction:

Guest Guessing Game

If you're visiting a church and some guy just gets up and starts preaching, you kind of assume he's the pastor. But it's still nice to know.

Pavlov's Pastor

In most of our churches, we've conditioned our folks to expect a certain who, what, and when. When the "what" comes (the message) and it's the wrong "who" (the youth pastor), there's an oh-so-slight disconcerting moment. (Unless you think the youth pastor's an idiot – then you're just plain tweaked.) The introduction really is a favor to both the guest speaker and the congregation.

Bad Wrap

It's a great way to transition out of another "talking" element, like the announcements. When someone besides the senior pastor does announcements, that person often doesn't know how to wrap.

"So yeah, there are the announcements. I think that's all we have. Anything else? No? Um, Okay then. Well, thanks for listening. I'm going to go sit over there by my wife now...."

A simple fix is to give the announcement guy something concrete to end his time. "While Pastor Smith is coming up, open your Bibles to Matthew 18 as we continue our series on forgiving people you think are idiots."

The above illustrates a call-to-action ("open your Bibles") with a quick summary of the topic or series. This can work well as an introduction. It gives the pastor and the congregation a moment to settle in to the beginning of the message.

What doesn't always work so well is the Late Show-*esque* "and now let's welcome our pastor!!!" *If no* one claps, it's a little awkward. And most pastors I know would *not* want to be introduced like that. If he does, bad segues are the least of that church's problems.

Conclusion

I hope this resource has giving you plenty of tips, tricks and tactics to make great transitions worship elements. But I also hope it's inspired you to come up with your own ideas.

The key is planning and preparation. If your church has never really bothered to create intentional flow in worship, you may face some resistance. My team used to balk at the idea of practicing the segues between songs, but now it's just a part of our rehearsal. I also used to create worship service scripts that no one read. Now we have a 9:05AM meeting every Sunday with everyone involved in the service to talk through all the elements, especially transitions. Why? Because we know if something will go wrong, it's likely going to happen in the hand-offs.

So if you're just starting out, start simple. The flow you achieve in worship will be noticed and appreciated (by most), and it will give you the credibility to begin to build better segues into every part of your service.

Bonus Section