

||: RECEIVE, REHEARSE, RELEASE:|



**SUSTAINABLE RHYTHMS FOR THE
WEEKEND WORSHIP SERVICE**

Ebook By Seth Putnam

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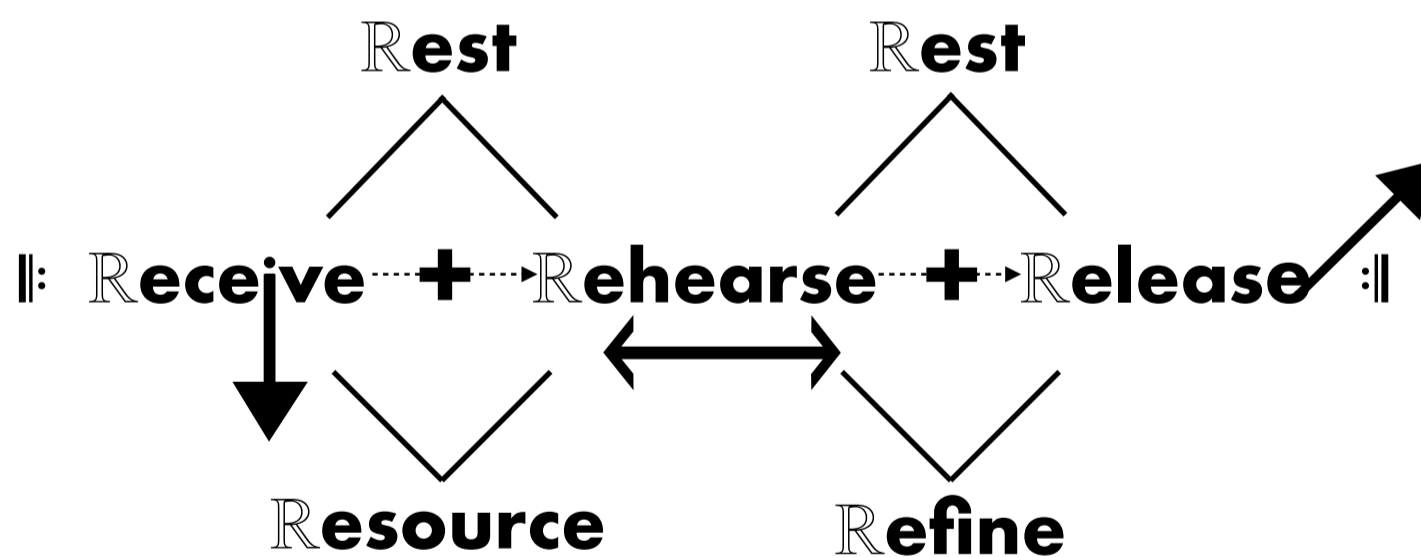
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INTRODUCTION

Hello. My name is Seth Putnam, and I've been involved in some capacity of worship leadership for almost twenty years. I remember starting with no online resources to help and no clue how to start (where was *Planning Center Online*¹ when you needed it?). Throughout my worship leader journey, I've investigated different philosophical approaches to worship, interviewed various leaders who were doing it right, and tried to implement holistic practices toward a healthy worship culture. This ebook is my attempt to let you in on my theory of *how to run a weekly worship rehearsal and adequately prepare for services*. It's not exhaustive and will, of course, be contextual to my community. Nevertheless, I'm confident that there are insights here that you can benefit from.

I pray this booklet encourages, challenges, and helps you discover your own rhythm to weekly worship. Whether you're full-time, part-time, or spare time as a leader in worship, this ebook is for you.

Below is a weekly worship rhythm diagram discussed further in the following chapters. This diagram will make more sense as you read the book. **Enjoy!**



RECEIVE ↓



The Discipline of Receiving

The first step in receiving a set list for the weekend is not by strategy or intuition; it's through *prayer and petition*. The Psalmist questions, “Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?” (Psalm 24:3). In other words, who can approach and abide in God’s Holy presence? The reply is mysterious yet revealing— “The one who has *clean hands* and a *pure heart*, who does *not trust in an idol or swear by a*

false god. They will *receive* blessing from the Lord and vindication from God their Savior.” (Psalm 24:4-5). Because our hearts and intuitions can be faulty (see Jeremiah 17:9), we must ensure purity of heart and undefiled hands before crafting the worship liturgy. I have found that receiving songs, rather than mentally planning set lists, flow seamlessly when I’ve ascended the mountain of the Lord in prayer. With pure intentions, a surrendered heart, and diligent hands not wanting to worship the ‘idol of worship,’ I come off the mountain with a Spirit-led plan. I am open to receiving because of time spent with the Lord in prayer and petition concerning what songs/prayers the congregation should enter into on Sunday. But the key to receiving well is first, you must *see* and *believe*.

Seeing and Believing

Matthew 5:8 says, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” It is the ones with pure intentions who love Christ and desire to “feed his lambs” and “take care and feed His sheep” (see John 21:15-17) that truly see the Lord. And in *seeing*, you must *believe* that his direction and wisdom are for the church's good. **Receiving starts with *seeing* and ends with *faithfully believing* what He has entrusted you.** You might end up with a worship liturgy that is not your stylistic or theological preference, but it will be full of His Presence. Trust the Lord in this first step of receiving.

A Prayer of Receiving

If you feel stuck and unsure how to petition God to receive songs, let's utilize the **Lord's Prayer** and a follow-up constructed prayer for help in receiving:

THE LORDS PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen.²

A RECEIVING PRAYER

Gracious Father, Your name is Holy and Worthy, and You are far above all created things.

I pray that the reign of your Kingdom would continue to expand in my time, and that earth would be full of the knowledge of the Glory of the Lord like waters cover the sea.

With clean hands, a pure heart, and a steadfast mind, I ask that you release the songs for this upcoming service to me. I want to serve others with the songs and worship liturgy You see fit for our community. I need Your Spirit's leading and guiding, and I trust You while not leaning on my own understanding.

In this receiving posture, please speak to me about my heart and where I need to make things right with others. I desire to worship you in Spirit and in Truth.

Keep me away from the idolatry of worship and self-preference, and lead me into the Father's heart, for I desire to see you and to believe what you have given me.

It's all about You! I receive today, in Jesus' name, Amen.

REST & RESOURCE

Work from a Place of Rest

After receiving songs or a set list for a service, it's essential to let yourself "rest" in the set. What do I mean by rest? **There needs to be a settledness of where you're headed, a rumination in faith where you walk through the setlist as if it's *your* journey.** And guess what? It is your journey, too. The Lord is bringing you into this pathway of worship because you are also a part of the Body of Christ. Never forget that. This setlist is also for your spiritual benefit.

Resource your team

Just sending out your setlist to the worship team isn't good enough. You need to be able to resource your worship team with proper communication about the songs, the musical components, and any extra details you have about the "flow" of the worship service. I have found that leaders can execute the vision properly when communicating and providing resources to their team for the worship set. **To resource your team before rehearsal is to set your team up for success!**



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Consider using online platforms and companies³ that can help streamline your communication, and help facilitate systems that help you manage your team, and house MP3s/chord charts/lyrics as resources. Outsourcing this help will save many hours on your end.

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Resourcing your team could include creating chord and lyric charts, vocal and instrumental mp3s, and communicating setlist notes. Let's now proceed to the next major step.

REHEARSE ↔

The Art of Team Rehearsals

Rehearsals can be set up in a million different ways, **but effective rehearsals have clear targets.** Targets can range from the obvious (i.e., practicing for the weekend service) to experimenting with additional concepts like devotional moments with the team, onboarding new team members, or even trying out creative elements within the worship service. A healthy rhythm of spiritual formation, community, musicality, and professionalism all set up for a great rehearsal.

Philosophy of a Worship Team

Before getting into the structure of a worship team rehearsal, I need to clarify how I view a worship team. I see it through 2 lenses: (1) A family lens and (2) a competitive sports team lens. The first one might seem obvious, but it deserves specificity. A worship team is *a family*. Kinship language is used throughout the New Testament scriptures to describe the Church of Jesus Christ.⁴ This kindred view is how I treat my team— as brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers, not just singers and musicians. **The relational dynamic of the team is emphasized through this lens.** This familial view is also helpful in reminding ourselves that the Lord has made us a family. In parallel with our own lives, we don't *choose* our own family; We are born into a specific family without our say. And this is how it is with a worship family. The Lord called you to be a part of a particular spiritual covering, so you must trust that the Lord has brought you to the *right* family.

The other lens through which I view a worship team is through what I label a competitive sports team. Odd, I know, but hear me out. Competitive sports teams train to win championships. The worship team is not a bush league team playing only for fun. They are a team that trains together to win the prize. In this case, **our prize is to help people encounter the presence of the Lord and not be a distraction in the process.** This is the type of view that focuses on excellence in our craft for the sake of removing distractions and helping people find freedom.

Methodology of a Professional - Preparation, Rehearsal, & Service

So that all being said, worship team rehearsals should be productive. You want to train your team to come prepared like a musical professional. How does a professional prepare, you ask? Through the disciplines of **preparation, rehearsing, and serving!** Your team's first action after receiving the worship set is the act of **Preparation - the *internalization* of the liturgy**. This is where your team members practice the worship set alone. They figure out their parts, work on memorizing lyrics or music, and even think about stage presence while listening to the whole song. Interestingly, **practice devoid of God's presence is all technical and has no heart, so make sure to invite the Lord into your preparation time**. Next is the discipline of **Rehearsal - the *formation* of the liturgy**. This should be time spent on tightening up the individual parts and focusing on the group feel of the



worship set. Your team needs to kinetically feel what the worship will be like with others, especially transitions or speaking moments. So, give them space to rehearse the songs together and even end rehearsal with a run-through.⁵ This helps your worship and audio teams, for audio also needs the reps. Lastly, when these two steps are completed, a professional will be ready for **Service - the *incarnation* of the liturgy**. Before service starts, it's always good to gather the team to run through the worship set (for recollection) and pray over the coming service(s), as this is where confidence and calling are intertwined in the worshipper's soul. **Service is the time we are allotted to minister to the Lord before *and on* behalf of the people of God.**

Structure of Worship Team Rehearsals

If you're unsure how a rehearsal should be run, you need TWO significant components to work in tandem. You need your audio engineer and worship leader to be on the same page. The audio engineer has the authority, at first, during rehearsal, to help line-check instruments and microphones and soundcheck the team.⁶ This step will help give the audio engineers what they need for rehearsal. After this step, it's helpful for the worship leader to pick up the authority and direct the rehearsal.

A productive rehearsal could be run like this:

1. Audio Call Time: 30 minutes before the worship team shows up to set up the stage and prepare the audio.

2. Worship Team Call Time: a 15-minute window for the worship team (band and vocals) to come on stage and get line-checked and sound-checked.

3. Community Time: anywhere between 10 - 20 minutes of checking in with your team. This could include a time of testimony, reflection from the previous service, or perhaps even a time of prayer over each other. Some other good uses of this time could include a short devotional led by someone on the team.

4. Rehearse the Songs: depending on your set list, rehearse each song and be clear on what parts to focus on as you rehearse them. Don't be afraid to work on sections of the song first before you go over the complete song. To reiterate what was mentioned earlier on the previous page, your team should be working on bringing their already practiced parts to the whole. This is a time to dial in your team sound for the songs, not learn the songs.

5. Quick Break: taking a quick breather before the run-through is always helpful for morale. I recommend anywhere between 10 -15 minutes as that gives enough time and doesn't lose rehearsal momentum.

6. Run-Through: Before leaving rehearsal, run through the entire worship set to know how it will flow. This is usually a missing step in most worship teams, and in my opinion, it is the difference between a mediocre experience and a great one with volunteers. Also, consider recording (visual and audio) the run-through so you can later inspect it before Sunday and provide the team with any helpful notes. **You don't get what you expect, but what you inspect.**

7. Gratitude: End the rehearsal by always thanking your team for the hard work of rehearsing for service, and make sure to help clean up the stage to prepare it for Sunday. A clean stage is a clear mind on Sunday.

The targets of a rehearsal

As mentioned earlier, there are a few targets to hit for a great rehearsal. I've found that dedicating time at the beginning of rehearsal for community and spiritual formation is an excellent way to build healthy culture within your team. You're missing the mark if you're only rehearsing music during rehearsals. Strive to be a *spiritual community* that offers testimonies and simultaneously puts forward prayer requests, and watch your team become more than just a Sunday team. You'll become "like living stones" being "built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood" (see 1 Peter 2:5). Your team, over time, may *not* remember the songs you've taught them or the teachings you gave **but they will remember how loved and valued they felt when they were around you.** *Strive for this.*

Another target for rehearsal should be *Excellence* - **the unfettered professionalism in our musicality and the hard work of removing distractions in our service.** Rehearsal is a space to work hard at bringing our parts together. This often translates into making adjustments on the spot and finding how our playing best serves the song, not necessarily playing the song like we'd want to. A good leader will call the team's attention to this. **Excellence is reverence to the Lord.** *Strive for this.*

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If you have people who have auditioned to join the team but have yet to be quite ready due to competency issues, consider using rehearsals to train vocalists, instrumentalists, and even production support. A great leader will look for opportune moments to help improve others for the team, not just wait for gifted people to show up. So why not take advantage of this time when your team rehearses?

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Oh, and lastly, a rehearsal should be fun! Yes, a target for rehearsal should be *enjoyment*. If you're going to work hard at putting all the parts together, you might as well have fun doing it. **Music is most enjoyable when done in the company of those you love.** *Strive for this.*



REST & REFINE

Rest in the works of your hands

What does a leader do after working hard in a rehearsal? **Rest.** That's right; every person needs time to recollect their thoughts, and unhurried reflection is helpful. Having no rest points within your weekly rhythm is a sure way to eventual soul-burnout. That's why the type of rest this stage in your rhythm requires is a rest in the spiritual discipline of *gratitude*. Your first rest was a 'rest in faith' for what is to come, but now you are being called into a 'rest of thankfulness' (hopefully, it's rest and not considered a *respite* from rehearsal). I have found that taking the time to appreciate what the Lord has done so far with what he's entrusted to you, including your team, really helps open your eyes to the spiritual formation in your soul and the souls of your team members. The Apostle Paul practiced⁷ being grateful for the Lord's calling on his life, and this gratitude often led him to recollect his testimony, sometimes concluding with a doxological praise unto God.

Similarly, the leader's reflection and practice of gratitude for the Lord's calling and work of their hands (as well as the worship team's calling and works) can produce a heart of thanksgiving for what the Lord has done and is continuing to do. This gratitude often leads towards praise unto a God who "began a good work" in you and will "carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."⁸ The leader (and their team) should rest to reflect and trust the Lord with the works of their hands. It's a posture of gratitude.

Refining your sound

After a time of rest, a leader will do well to listen back to the run-through recording from rehearsal and evaluate their team. **You get what you inspect**, so if you're not inspecting your team's sound, you're missing out on a chance to correct areas that need it. At this point of the weekly rhythm, I think of myself as a producer and type up notes for the team to read. These notes are usually minor adjustment points, but they make a radical difference if we take the time to refine.

RELEASE ↗

The Joy of Service

After putting in the humble work of receiving, being diligent in resting and resourcing your team, having worked out your worship set in rehearsal, and continuing to rest while refining the set an extra 15-20%, we have finally arrived at the day of service with joy and expectation. I am most at ease and present with people on service days when I've put in the healthy rhythms of work and rest to get to service. **This day should be when we release**



what has been formed in us throughout the week. Depending on the Holy Spirit's leading, plans can change (and sometimes do), but that shouldn't stress our teams out. We should find ourselves ready to pour out what the Lord has been preparing in us.

Outside of a quick line check when the whole team arrives ahead of service time, running through your worship set as if it is a service is best. This dramatically helps your team recall the run-through in rehearsal and, most importantly, practice the presence of God before service. I call the preservice run-through the worship and production teams "Secret, Hidden Service." And we treat it like a service. If ministry moments are to be had in your worship set, walk into those during the preservice run-through. This is a perfect time to practice the presence of God and minister to and with your team.

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Remember the power of casting vision to your worship team around all the steps involving them. Giving the "why" behind what you're doing helps create team member buy-in! After all, we all leak, so helpful reminders as to 'why we do what we do' can go a long way.

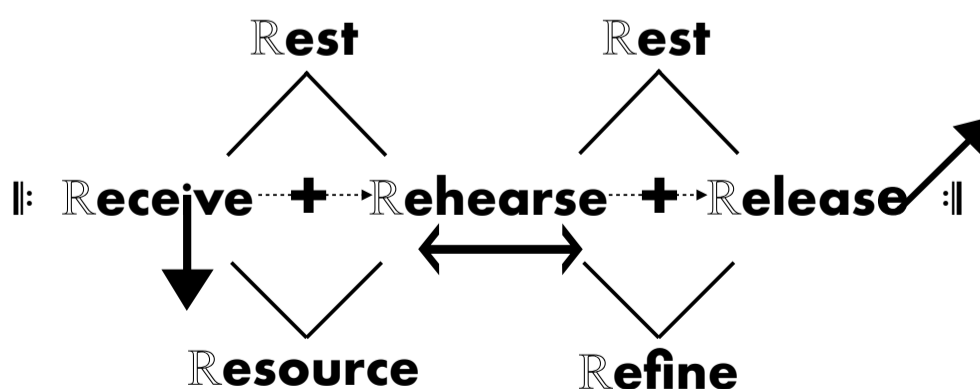
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Re-entered and Re-centered in Prayer

After you walk through the preservice run-through, you'll probably have some time until the actual service starts. This is great for resting up and adjusting anything that needs to be tightened in the worship set. Because of this extra time, I like to gather the worship team 10 minutes before service starts and help them **Re-enter and Re-center** their hearts to Jesus and the service at hand. It's easy to get nervous and distracted when service starts, so I help my team focus on what's most important: (1) the Lord and (2) the people we are about to serve. Anything and everything else can wait.

Reflection and Celebration in Multiple Services

If you're at a church with multiple services, consider regrouping at the end of each service to review any particular moments. Perhaps there was a God moment that stood out in service, or maybe you want to give a "shout-out award" to a team member who did a great job in the worship set. **Having reflection and celebration moments on service days with your team can help them become more aware of what the Lord is doing.** You can also take advantage of that moment by giving general coaching or course correcting for the next service if needed. Galvanizing the team's attention can be very helpful for the following service(s). Regardless of the content in regrouping, it's good for your team to gather and celebrate what the Lord has done in service. What a joy it is to release what the Lord has birthed in you and released through your team. To God be all the Glory!



EPILOGUE

The title of this ebook is **Receive, Rehearse, Release**, but if you look closely at the title page, you'll notice an additional phrase surrounding the title.

Go ahead and retake a look.

There is a set of musical notation symbols surrounding the title that look like this: ||: :||

In written music, this symbol is called a **repeat sign**, and it represents a section in music that should be, well, repeated. Some repeats can have structure as to how often they are repeated, **OR** they can be repeated until the conductor says to stop. The point of the symbols added to the title is to call attention to the fact that this sustainable rhythm is to be repeated. The strength of your worship team does not solely lie within doing the principles in this ebook once. There has to be a consistent weekly rhythm of receiving, rehearsing, and releasing to see results and form a new discipline. This may seem obvious, but to some, it is not. So, the title should correctly be pronounced: **Receive, Rehearse, Release, Repeat**.

Also, just like some repeats continue until the conductor calls them beyond, we must pay attention to the Lord, the great conductor, and keep our eyes on his leadership. For certain people, this sustainable rhythm will be ongoing, and for others, it is just for a season to be a foundation for what's next to come. No system is absolute gospel, so keep your eyes attentive to the Lord as he helps shape your leadership and worship team.

If you made it to the end, I pray you would be empowered to implement healthy, sustainable rhythms, like those found in this ebook, for your weekend worship service. If this material has helped you, would you consider sharing it with others who might benefit from it? I would also love to hear from you if this ebook made a difference in your worship leadership. You can reach me at this email address: seth@sethputnam.net, and make sure to visit my website (sethputnam.net) often to view and download other worship resources for you and your team.

Grace and Peace.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Planning Center Online, or PCO for short, is a software tool to help you organize services and effectively resource teams. For more information, visit <https://www.planningcenter.com> (as of 1/12/2024)

² Matthew 6:9-13; late manuscripts include the last two lines of the Lords Prayer.

³ Some platforms that specifically work well with worship teams are [multitracks.com](https://www.multitracks.com); [loopcommunity.com](https://www.loopcommunity.com); <https://www.planningcenter.com>;

⁴ Scriptures on the Family of God: Romans 12:5; Ephesians 2:19-22; Ephesians 3:14-15; 1 Timothy 5:1-2; 1 Peter 2:17; 1 John 3:1-2

⁵ **Run-Through** - In the music world, a run-through is a chance to gather all the music set pieces and run through them, in order, as if it were a dress rehearsal.

⁶ **Line-check** - checking the dynamic gain and input of each instrument and vocalist on a microphone; **Soundcheck** - checking the collective sound of the instrumentalists together, of the vocalists together, and finally, of both instrumentalists and vocalists together.

⁷ Examples such as Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Colossians 3:17; 1 Timothy 1:12

⁸ Philippians 1:6 (NIV)