

LEARNING TO STAY

Worship Templates for Leaders
Internal Guide | Lent 2026



Who This Is For

This guide is written for pastors, worship leaders, elders, and shared leadership teams planning Lent 2026. It is especially designed for congregations without full-time clergy, limited planning capacity, or high levels of fatigue. Leaders are encouraged to read this guide once in full, then return only to the template needed for a given week.

How to Use These Templates

These worship templates are offered as forms, not formulas.

They are not scripts to be followed word for word, nor are they benchmarks for “doing Lent correctly.” They are repeatable shapes designed to support faithful worship when energy is limited, leadership is shared, and clarity is hard to come by.

Leaders are encouraged to:

- repeat the same template across multiple weeks,
- adapt language to fit local context,
- shorten services when needed,
- and trust that restraint is not failure.

These templates assume that formation happens over time, not through novelty or intensity. Their strength lies in consistency, pacing, and permission to let God work without constant explanation.

If a service feels quiet, thin, or unresolved, that does not mean it has failed. It may mean it is doing precisely what this season asks.

Shortening a service by removing words rather than silence preserves the integrity of these templates.

These templates assume that Communion will occur during Holy Week rather than weekly throughout Lent.

A Word About Tone and Progression

These three templates are arranged intentionally.

They move:

- from naming reality,
- to staying under strain,
- to remaining in silence.

The progression is not about emotional escalation. It is about deepening trust—trust that God is present without being managed, explained, or rushed.

Leaders should feel no pressure to manufacture or ‘match’ the emotional weight of the template. The work is not to create a feeling, but to hold space faithfully.

TEMPLATE 1

Gathering + Truth-Telling

Early Lent | Naming Reality Without Resolving It

Theological Aim

To gather the community honestly before God, naming fatigue, distraction, and unfinished lives without rushing toward reassurance or solutions.

Emotional Tone

Grounded. Calm. Honest. Unhurried.

Not bleak—but not prematurely hopeful.

What This Service Is Practicing

- Presence over productivity
- Naming reality as an act of faith
- Trust that God meets us before we are ready

What This Service Is NOT

- A motivational reset
- A confessional dump without care
- An attempt to explain suffering

Core Movements (approximately 55–60 minutes)

1. Quiet Gathering (5 min)
 - Soft music or silence as people arrive
 - No announcements yet
 - Leaders model stillness
2. Call to Worship (2–3 min)
 - Simple, invitational language
 - Avoid triumphal or commanding tones
 - Emphasize God's presence *before* our response
3. Opening Prayer (3 min)
 - Addresses God plainly
 - Names weariness, distraction, divided attention
 - Asks for attentiveness, not answers
4. Scripture (8–10 min)
 - Read slowly
 - Multiple readers encouraged
 - Silence held after reading
5. Truth-Telling Response (10–12 min)
Options (choose one):
 - Guided communal prayer of confession
 - Written or spoken naming of burdens
 - Short reflection offered without explanation
6. Silence (2–4 min)
 - Explicitly named as prayer
 - Leaders resist filling the space
7. Song or Instrumental Response (4–5 min)
 - Restrained, familiar, or repetitive
 - Avoid emotional escalation

8. Affirmation of Trust (3 min)
 - Creed, scripture, or shared spoken trust
 - Emphasis on God's faithfulness, not certainty
9. Prayers of the People (5–6 min)
 - Brief, spacious
 - Include silence between petitions
10. Sending (3 min)
 - Gentle commissioning
 - No "go change the world" language
 - Emphasize staying attentive in ordinary life

Notes for Churches Without Pastors

- Shared leadership works well here
- Silence does not require explanation
- Less commentary strengthens credibility

If This Feels Uncomfortable, You Are Not Doing It Wrong

Many leaders will notice discomfort when using these templates:

- silence may feel too long,
- the service may feel “unfinished,”
- people may not offer immediate feedback.

This is normal.

Discomfort does not mean disengagement.

Quiet does not mean absence.

Lack of resolution does not mean lack of faith.

Leaders are invited to stay themselves—to resist over-explaining, rescuing the moment, or filling space out of anxiety. Modeling calm, unhurried presence is itself an act of leadership.

TEMPLATE 2

Staying Under Pressure

Mid-Lent | Conflict, Delay, Unanswered Prayer

Theological Aim

To remain faithful and present when following Christ feels costly, confusing, or unresolved.

Emotional Tone

Tense but steady.

Honest about strain without dramatizing it.

What This Service Is Practicing

- Endurance without denial
- Faithfulness without control
- Remaining present under strain

What This Service Is NOT

- Conflict resolution
- Emotional release for its own sake
- Moral instruction disguised as worship

Core Movements (approximately 55–60 minutes)

1. Gathering in Silence (3–4 min)
 - Silence begins before the service formally starts
2. Call to Worship (2–3 min)
 - Names difficulty of staying
 - Invites people who feel conflicted or unsure
3. Prayer for Courage (3 min)
 - Addresses fear, resistance, and avoidance
 - Avoids “everything happens for a reason”
4. Scripture (10–12 min)
 - Central reading emphasized
 - Silence immediately afterward
5. Reflection or Testimony (8–10 min)
Options:
 - Short reflection on delay, resistance, or cost
 - Carefully framed testimony (not resolution-focused)
6. Extended Silence (4–6 min)
 - This is the heart of the service
 - Leaders should expect discomfort
7. Song or Lament (4–5 min)
 - Minor key or restrained tone
 - Familiar hymns work better than new material
8. Prayers of the People (5–6 min)
 - Fewer words
 - Allow space between petitions
9. Blessing for the Journey (3 min)
 - Acknowledges unfinished faith
 - Sends people without resolution

Notes for Churches Without Pastors

- This template legitimizes uncertainty
- Do not rush silence
- Leaders should resist explaining discomfort

Preparing the Community for Deep Silence

The third template assumes some prior formation.

Before using it, leaders may wish—earlier in the season—to name gently that:

- silence will become more central,
- words will become fewer,
- Easter will not be anticipated prematurely.

This preparation does not require theological explanation. A simple statement such as,

“This is a service where we will stay with what cannot yet be resolved,”
is sufficient.

When communities know what to expect, they are more able to remain present.

TEMPLATE 3

Held Silence

Late Lent | Holy Week | Waiting Without Resolution

Theological Aim

To remain present when words fail and God feels hidden, trusting that silence itself can be faithful.

Emotional Tone

Sparse. Weighty. Reverent.
Intentionally unresolved.

What This Service Is Practicing

- Waiting without outcome
- Trust without explanation
- Faithfulness without reassurance

What This Service Is NOT

- A teaching service
- A rehearsal for Easter
- An emotional crescendo

Core Movements (approximately 55–60 minutes)

1. Entering Silence (5–7 min)
 - Silence begins immediately
 - No spoken welcome
2. Scripture (8–10 min)
 - One primary text
 - Read slowly, possibly once only
3. Silence (10–15 min)
 - Longest silence of the season
 - Leaders should prepare the community beforehand
4. Minimal Prayer (3–4 min)
 - Very few words
 - Often scripture-based
5. Symbolic Action (5–7 min)
Examples:
 - Extinguishing light
 - Removing cloth or symbol
 - Sitting in darkness
6. Song or Instrumental (3–4 min)
 - Optional
 - Should not resolve the mood
7. Final Silence (5–7 min)
 - No spoken benediction
 - People depart quietly

Notes for Churches Without Pastors

- This service requires confidence in restraint
- Silence is the sermon
- Trust the community's capacity to wait

Final Guidance for All Three Templates

- Consistency matters more than novelty
- Silence will feel long before it feels faithful
- Leaders model staying by not rushing
- Not every service must feel “successful”

These templates are meant to **carry the season**, not impress the congregation. If people learn how to remain present—together—then the worship has done its quiet work.

Final Encouragement to Leaders

You are not responsible for making these services meaningful.

You are responsible for staying present, setting a faithful pace, and trusting that God is already at work—often beneath the surface.

Some weeks will feel thin.

Some silences will feel awkward.

Some services will end without clarity.

This is not a sign of failure.

Faithfulness in this season looks like remaining, not producing.

Holding space, not filling it. Trusting that what is planted quietly will bear fruit in time.

You, too, are learning to stay.

These Lenten Resources are made by Rev. Matthew J. Skolnik.

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