

## Good Friday Worship Stations: Seven Last Words of Jesus



### What is Sensate Worship?

Sensate worship is using the five senses to demonstrate and experience spiritual truth in a holistic, participatory way. This is done in two primary ways:

- **The Tangible reinforcing the Intangible:** Spiritual truths are demonstrated and personalized by means of metaphors that can be experienced physically, as when we take the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.
- **The Visible revealing the Beauty of the Invisible:** Aesthetic elements heighten and reinforce the emotional component and long-term memory of spiritual truth, through such things as art, music, dance, and environment. The worshipper may not only appreciate, but also participate in creating an artistic expression in response to God and his truth.

### Principles and Questions for Designing Sensate Worship Stations

- **Unifying Theme:** Worship stations are best when they help the worshipper discover and interact with a single complex concept, rather than disconnected thoughts and impressions. Think about choosing one passage of Scripture (e.g. the Beatitudes), or theological concept (e.g. the Lord's Supper), or set of ideas (e.g. seven deadly sins). Then participants have a chance to integrate their knowledge and let the different facets reinforce each other.
- **Stimulus & Response:** All stations should have an "In" and an "Out" component: something for the participants to take in and meditate on, and a way to respond. Either one or occasionally both of these may be a sensate element. The "In," however, should be rooted in Scripture to anchor the sensory experience in solid truth.
- **Variety of Sensory Experience:** How have you used the different senses in the various stations? Go through all five senses, and make sure that you are using all of them as appropriate to the content (not as a gimmick). Make sure you have not overbalance on one sense; you don't want every station to be mainly visual, for example. Don't forget taste and smell—these can be very powerful stimulants to remembering the truths you are meditating on later.
- **Information Transfer:** How are you going to communicate the central truth in each station so that the sensate elements have the deepest impact? Think about these means:

- Posting the basic information and instructions at each station. In this case, the material to be read must be simple, clear and easy to see, or participants will likely not understand what to do, or worse, miss the point.
- Creating a sheet or booklet with basic information/instructions for each participant. This is more easily consulted and can help integrate the facets for the person, with the added bonus that they can take it away with them later.
- Using guides as well as written materials to personally communicate information and instructions. These guides may remain at an individual station, or may accompany a group throughout the experience.
- **Sequence & Flow:** Do the stations need to be experienced in sequence, or could they be done in any order? If they must be done in sequence, how will you prevent bottlenecks? Does everyone start at once, or will people be coming in at intervals or randomly? These questions will determine much of your design.
- **Determine Path:** Is this going to be a solitary path that the individual follows (such as a prayer labyrinth)? Should people do the stations in pairs? Will groups move through the stations with guides? The theme you have chosen and/or the size of the group going through the installation may be determining factors here. Choices run the gamut from individuals wandering randomly from one station to another, to groups moving through stations together and changing at pre-determined intervals.
- **Environment:** How does the venue you have chosen accommodate the stations? Is there a clear path for people? How can spaces be transformed? What environmental features (sound, lighting, video, decoration) can you tailor to the mood and use to reinforce the overall theme of the stations?
- **Engagement:** How will you engage people for whom sensory worship is not a primary pathway? What kind of support or alternatives will you offer them? (I have found that there is a lot of value in people doing prayer stations together in pairs or groups, especially if the sensory pathway is not a preferred one.)

### Goal of “Seven Last Words” Worship Installation

The goal of this worship installation is for participants to journey with Jesus through his passion, and in doing so, to recognize what his death accomplished for them in terms of forgiveness, family, and righteousness.

### Setting up the Venue

- **Mood:** Since it is meant for a Good Friday observance, the mood of this installation is relatively somber. Think of how you can dim the lighting and use indirect sources, such as candles. (Pay attention to safety issues when using candles; as much as possible, make candles inaccessible or use them in enclosed lanterns. LED candles can be a much safer alternative when people are moving around.) You may also want to use fabric drapes of the same color to unify the surroundings or at least to

cover the tables used for stations. Cheap curtains or sheets can be useful here!

- **Areas:** You will need to create six distinct areas for the worship stations (the last two stations are together) and a clear path from one to the next. If the floor plan is not clear, think about making a map for people when they come in with instructions for each station. The fourth station will need particular care in its placing and setup.
  - Each station will need to have a display that has the saying and instructions on it, as well as other information necessary to fully engage with the experience. I have sometimes used cheap sawhorses/trestles on tables for freestanding displays, with poster paper stapled to them and the instructions mounted on that.
  - Because much of this is personal, the path is best followed individually. If you have people arriving all at the same time, then, you will need to think how to stagger their beginnings so as not to create bottlenecks. One solution: Only the first and last stations actually must be done in that order. The rest could be approached as space permits. Another solution is to have people sign up for times to begin, and have another activity they could do as they wait.
  - You also need to estimate how many people you will have at a time at each station and make sure there is space and materials for that number.
- **Music:** I used the soundtrack from *The Passion of the Christ* the last time I did this, but any melancholy instrumental could work. There are also a couple of classical compositions involving the Seven Last Words.
- **Projection:** Think about projecting images that will reinforce the message. You could use a slideshow of the F. Holland Day images at the top of the document, or other artworks involving the crucifixion. You could also project (with subtitles but without sound) a montage of the Seven Last Words from the Passion—although as always when using clips from this film, consider children who may be in your midst. Here is a link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWK4N5LIUWk>

### Station 1: “Father, forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing”

- **Central Idea: Confession**
- **In:** In addition to the verse above, you may want to post some “prompts” to help people think about their own sin. These could just be single words, or the Ten Commandments, or something like Galatians 5:19-21 (“The acts of the flesh are obvious...”) or another such list. (The Message version of the Galatians 5 text is particularly convicting.) You could also, if you wished, have a silent video on a computer screen with a montage of words and pictures showing the kinds of sins people like us commit on a regular basis “without knowing what we are doing”.
- **Out:** On instructions, encourage people to confess sins to the Father for which they want to be forgiven. Provide strips of cloth bandage and markers to write on them. Participants should write the sins of which God convicts them on the bandage, and then bind this around their hand or arm as they go through the following stations.

- Practical note: Bandages are thin. Provide paper underneath that can blot the marker as people write—and perhaps a way to throw it away if it “reveals” what they have written. Newspaper can be good because it obscures what is written and rubs off on the bandage, adding to its “dirtiness”.
- **Materials:** Printed information and instructions on display; bandages cut in strips (look for bandages with a relatively tight weave rather than loose gauze); markers; newspaper or other blotting paper; (optional: computer with montage).

### Station 2: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

- **Central Idea: Hope for the Sinner**
- **In:** In addition to the verse above, provide a means for people to watch and listen to the song “Thief” by Third Day. This could be on a computer or TV screen with multiple headphone sets, or it could be in a separate room with projection. There are various video versions of this; the link following is suitable for children as well:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYkC6pliiQw>
  - If you project this in a separate room, it might be good to station a guide at the door and let people in each time you play the song again, rather than have people interrupting it.
- **Out:** Have questions posted to help people identify with the thief, such as: How does this word of Jesus give you hope in spite of all the words on your bandage? How do you feel like the thief? You can just let people meditate on this, or give them a concrete way to react, such as writing.
- **Materials:** Medium to show and listen to video; printed information and instructions

### Station 3: “Dear woman, here is your son... Here is your mother.”

- **Central Idea: Thankfulness for the Family of Christ**
- **In:** In addition to the saying above, you could also use Mark 3:34-35, and Matthew 19:29, in which Jesus identifies his disciples as part of God’s family. You might want to use various artistic pictures of this incident as well (such as the one on the right) to help people respond to the emotion of this moment when Jesus gives his mother into John’s care and creates a new kind of family under his Father.
- **Out:** Provide heart-shaped Post-Its and ask people to write something about their thankfulness for the Family of Christ made possible through his sacrifice, and put it up on a wall or board. You might also supply small thank you notes that they could write to a particular person who has been their father or mother, brother or sister in Christ in a special way, to be given to them later.
- **Materials:** Printed information and instructions; art depicting incident; heart-shaped Post-Its; pens, thank-you notes and envelopes



#### Station 4: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

- **Central idea: Christ’s Isolation for my Reconciliation**
- **In:** This saying comes directly from Psalm 22 and it would be good to have a longer excerpt of it for people to read. These might be best printed up on small cards or pieces of paper rather than posted so people can concentrate on it better. This could be followed by an instruction to meditate on what it was like for Christ to be separated from the Father. Then each individual person will spend some amount of time—usually a minute or two—in a dark and silent place doing this meditation.
  - This is one of the more challenging stations to set up and move people through. In our office, we draped a bathroom with dark cloth and set a chair in the middle of the floor, and then simply put an “Occupied” sign out for people to hang on the door when they were in there. Another time, we set up a small tent which we draped with heavy blankets so that sound was muffled and no light could get in, and then stationed a guide to direct people in and out. You could have multiple small tents like this if you are doing this for a large group.
- **Out:** When people exit, give them a chance to respond to the fact that Jesus experienced this isolation in order that we would be reconciled to the Father. They can write their reactions to this on a large piece of black paper on a wall with white pen or white paint. You can further enhance this by using black light on the wall.
- **Materials:** Psalm 22 handouts; tents and blankets (or room with “occupied” sign); printed information and instructions; large black paper; white pens or white paint; black light (optional).

#### Station 5: “I am thirsty”

- **Central Idea: Appreciating Christ’s suffering our judgment**
- **In:** In addition to the saying above, you could also use Psalm 22:15: *My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.* Thirst was just one of the physical sufferings Jesus endured (you could supply more information on this if you wish). This drink was also symbolic, though, of the cup of judgment for sin that Jesus took on himself. We see this in Matthew 26:39: *“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*
- **Out:** In communion, we drink the cup in memory of Jesus’ blood. At this station, participants will drink small communion cups or shot glasses of red wine vinegar to remember Jesus’ suffering our judgment. You may also provide something to eat that will dry the mouth before drinking the vinegar to enhance this experience: saltines, biscottes, small pieces of Weetabix. Then the participant may say a prayer such as the one below and drink. (You will be surprised how powerful an experience this is.)
  - A liturgical Celtic prayer you may post is below:

God's will would I do,  
My own will bridle;



God's due would I give,  
 My own due yield;  
 God's path would I travel,  
 My own path refuse;  
 Christ's death would I ponder,  
 My own death remember;  
 Christ's agony would I meditate,  
 My love to God make warmer;  
 Christ's cross would I carry,  
 My own cross forget;  
 Repentance of sin would I make,  
 Early repentance choose;  
 A bridle to my tongue I would put,  
 A bridle on my thoughts I would keep  
 God's judgment would I judge,  
 My own judgment guard;  
 Christ's redemption would I seize,  
 My own ransom work;  
 The love of Christ would I feel,  
 My own love know.

- **Materials:** Printed materials; small glasses filled with red wine vinegar (you may have to have someone available to refill them); thirst-inducing snacks (optional).

#### Station 6: "It is finished!"

- **Central idea: Thankfulness for Christ's payment for our sins**
- **In:** In addition to the saying above, have an explanation that this Greek word—*tetelestai*—was a phrase commonly written across debts at the time that meant "Paid in full." This station should feature a reasonably large cross, preferably made from wood, which can be lying down on a table.
- **Out:** Participants may take the bandage that they wrote at the beginning off of their arm or hand, put it in an envelope and seal it. Then they can stamp "PAID" on the front with an ink stamp. These envelopes can then be attached to the cross, either with a hammer and nails, or, if noise is an issue, with pushpins/thumbtacks.
- **Materials:** Printed information and instructions; wooden cross; envelopes; PAID stamp and inkpad (or self-inking stamp); hammer & nails (or pushpins)

#### Station 7: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

- **Central idea: Recognition of our adoption by the Father because of Jesus' gift of righteousness**
- **In:** It is because God sees us now with Jesus' righteousness that we can be adopted by him as his children. Invite people to take a "crown of

righteousness” in place of our “dirty rags” that were nailed to the cross. This is a new men’s handkerchief folded to look like a crown (video instructions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rR3jLhgZ58>). These should be placed around the foot of the cross with the instruction nearby. Participants are free to take this memento home with them (be sure to have enough prepared for the expected number of people).

- Some Scripture texts you might include at this station: Romans 8:14-16; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 3:9-10; Galatians 4:4-5.
- **Out:** You might create a “wall of worship” at this station on which people could write or draw expressions of thankfulness for Christ’s sacrifice and their adoption. You might also create “adoption papers” that include Christ’s saying, giving people the opportunity to commit themselves to the Father as “living sacrifices” as Jesus committed himself to the Father in his sacrifice for us (Romans 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.*)
- **Materials:** Men’s handkerchiefs folded in crown fold (enough for each expected participant); “adoption papers”; pens; worship wall materials (large paper, markers, etc); other printed information and instructions on display.

### Worship Station Extensions

You may want to create other stations to extend people’s experience and give them a further chance to reflect and respond. Here are some simple suggestions:

- **Art Station:** This is just a large table with all sorts of art materials: paper, markers, pencils, pastels, possibly paints, glue, scissors, specialty papers, clay, ink stamps... whatever. It is also great to have a way for people to display their art work if they wish by providing sticky tack to hang it on the wall, or a line with clothespins. You might want to hang one of your own to create the suggestion. We have had some amazing works created in these times!
- **Writing Station:** This table provides various kinds of writing materials so that people can journal, write poetry, write notes to others, and so on. It is also nice to have a place to display these if people wish to share them, and you can display something of your own to start the ball rolling.
- **Communion Station:** You may also have a couple of people prepared to serve communion to those who approach them. I personally don’t believe communion should be “self-serve,” by just putting out a plate of bread and a glass of wine—it really is meant to be celebrated in community, even if with only two or three.
- **Prayer Station:** You may provide a place where people can come to pray with someone else, perhaps about something that has been stirred up by the experience. It is good to have a couple of people standing by ready to pray with those who want it.

What other ideas or adaptations have you come up with? I would be interested to know! Comment on my blog at [shannoncdeal.com](http://shannoncdeal.com).