



THE ULTIMATE SETLIST BUILDING GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Imagine leading a congregation in worship that's fully engaged from the start. That's the goal of every worship set, but why is getting everyone to engage with the presence of God such a struggle?

Believe it or not, our setlist has a powerful impact. The order in which we introduce concepts and dynamics will either draw the listener into engagement or push them away.

In this setlist building guide, you'll learn how to build a set that not only recognizes our earthly reality but draws us firmly into engaging with Christ's. There's nothing magical or super-holy about it, it just recognizes how God made us.

Sometimes we can be confronted with the majesty of God and not be in a place to engage it. Our job as worship leaders is to help our congregation reach that place of encounter.

In this guide, we're going to take a journey through a basic 5-song setlist. Unlike other approaches that organize sets around themes or styles, we are going to organize our set like an album. Each song has a purpose and serves to set up the next one. To do this, we are going to make our choices based on dynamic range which allows us to use any theme or style and still keep the engagement level high.

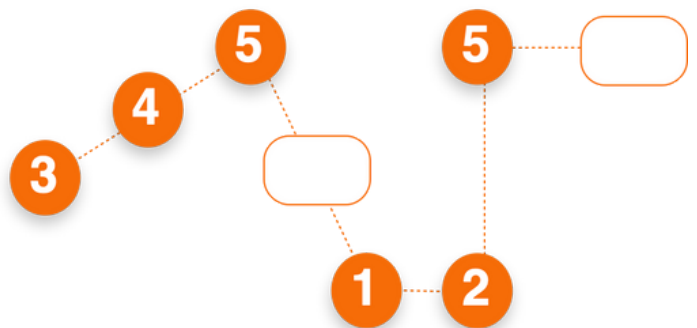
UNDERSTANDING DYNAMIC

Dynamic range is the overall intensity level of a song. An intensity level of "1" is going to start low and stay low. A "5" is going to go through the roof while a 2 - 4 falls somewhere in-between.

Dynamic range can be related to tempo, but it isn't defined by it. For example, a 5 can be a pounding dance number or it can be a song that builds in the bridge. Even though there is usually a shifting range within any song, we are applying a single number to each.



When it's all said and done, your set will look something like this.



Song 1 - The Opener

The first song is a focus-shifter-it lets everyone know you are starting. Most people are still finishing up their conversations or dropping their kids off at childcare. It's a mistake to expect anyone to really engage here. The first song is simply a "we're starting now" message.

A medium tempo "3" is a perfect choice-not too mellow, but still gives you room to build.



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Song 2 - The Momentum Builder

Nothing feels more wrong than flatlining or dropping the dynamic after the first song. It's time to build momentum so take Song #2 up a notch.

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Song 3 - Celebrate

Your third song should max out the set at a dynamic level of 5. You've built momentum and should have an engaged congregation, which is important when moving into a resting moment.

Give it your all on this one! It will signal celebration and that this leg of the journey is over. A quiet moment (song 4) won't go as well if you haven't spent your energy first.

CREATE A MOMENT

Once you've built up energy, gratitude, enjoyment, and trust, pause a moment and take in your surroundings. In this atmosphere, hearts are open and we begin to recognize God is with us. You could go directly into an intimate song, but this moment is an opportunity to set up the next leg of the journey.

In this moment you could share a personal story from the week, or open the floor for some public prayer. You could even put a reading on the screen or share the story behind the next song you are about to sing. Doing something outside of music creates something memorable and reaches a hand out to those who don't connect with God in a musical way. It also has the added benefit of making the return to music more refreshing.

After being at a 5 with song 3, we drop down to a 1. We get to listen, we get to linger, and we get to see and hear with our hearts. This is what worship it's all about.

Stay here as long as you can and fight the urge to build your song (or songs)—practice patience. Choose songs with lyrical depth and gentle intensity. Don't fear the silence.

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Song 5 - Lights Up

It can be jarring to move from an intimate time of worship into a sermon. Try finishing the set with a song that starts at a 1 but ends at a 5. It's like slowly bringing the lights up rather than turning them on.

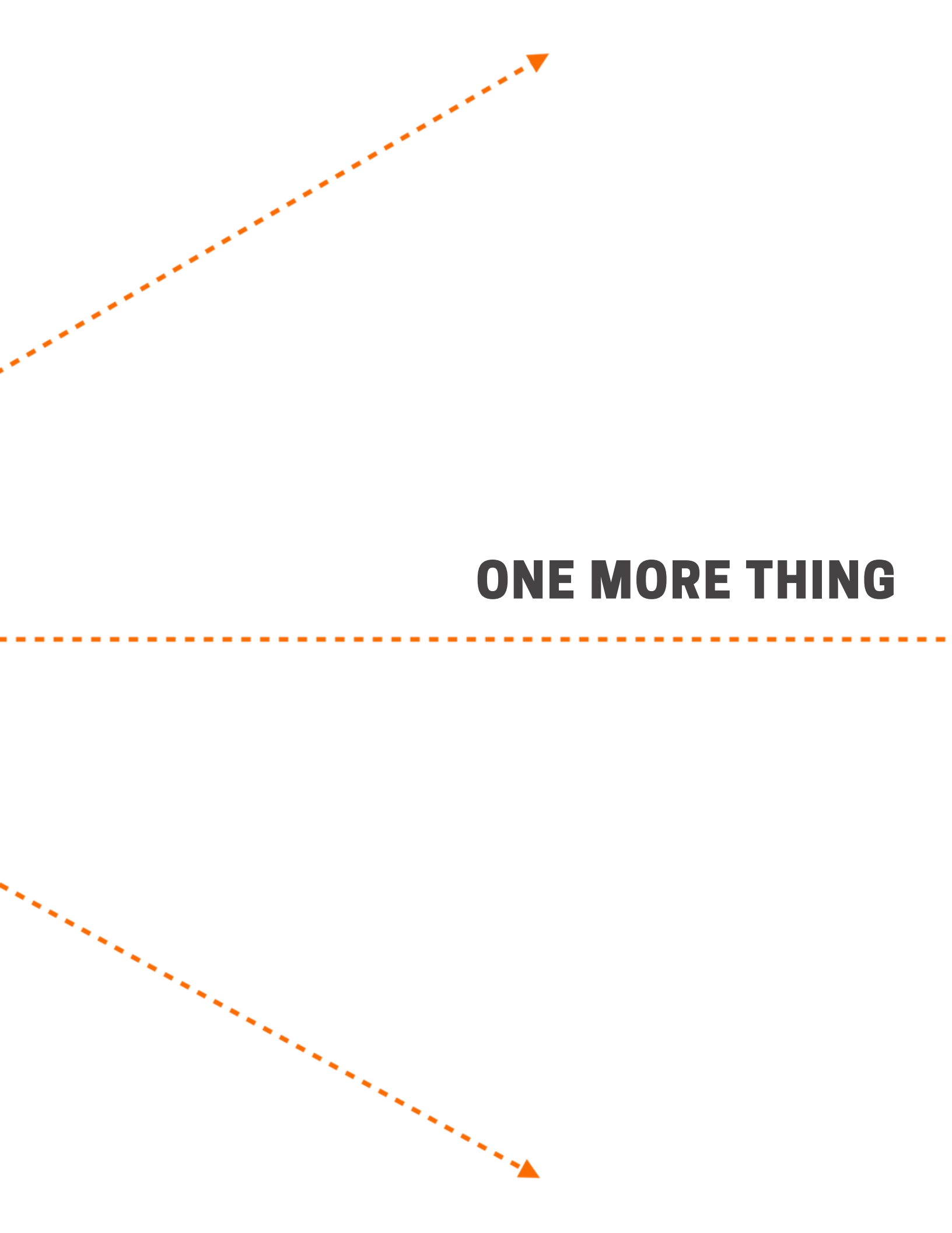
It's also a great way to put an exclamation point on a set and celebrate the connection we've made with our Creator. If done well, there is one more moment to be had.

1

THE TOGETHER MOMENT

Gathering to worship reminds us that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. After taking this journey together, finish your set with a “together” moment. Sing an acapella chorus or read a passage of scripture out loud. This moment can be anything that'll cause everyone to open their eyes, and appreciate the beauty and holiness of the experience just had.

This together moment is the exclamation point on the set and will often be the most memorable part of a gathering.



ONE MORE THING

BE AN ARTIST

Now it's time to get creative. This setlist guide gives you the colors, but you paint the picture. No one knows your community as you do, so design your sets to serve them.

As you use this guide to plan some of your upcoming sets, we would like to invite you to try Worship Artistry. You'll find in-depth song tutorials for your whole band (including chord charts and sheet music!). We exist to help musicians of every level answer the call to worship with passion and confidence.

Get your free trial at worshipartistry.com!

