

Worship in Community Groups

I. What is worship?

Revelation and response – God initiates with us by *revealing* His character (perfect holiness and love, transcendence and immanence) and performing mighty works. We worship by *responding* to Him in praise, confession, faith, gratitude, adoration, joy, and devotion.

“Re-presentation” of the gospel – In *Christ-Centered Worship*, author Bryan Chapell writes about how worship is a “re-presenting” of Christ’s story, the gospel, so it should have the following sequence:

- 1) God: His character and works
- 2) Confession and our need for God
- 3) God’s grace and the gospel
- 4) Celebration and our response of devotion

Sacrifice – Worship has something to do with dying, with offering to God what is most dear to us, with denying ourselves to follow Christ (Luke 9:23; Rom. 12:1). Think of Abel’s sacrifice versus Cain’s (Gen. 4:1-12; Heb. 11:4), Abraham called by God to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22:1-18), and Mary “wasting” perfume worth a year’s wages on Jesus (Matt. 26:6-13; cf. Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8). God will test the power of our idolatry by asking us to give up what we value most.

Trinitarian – God as Three-in-One is essential to our understanding of worship. Contrary to unitarian worship, which is all about what *we* do before God, trinitarian worship is our participation through the Spirit in the Son’s communion with the Father (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8; John 17; 1 John 1:3; Eph. 2:18). We are joining in with *Christ’s* worship of the Father and *His* mission to the world (this should relieve pressure). Christ is not only our Savior; He is also our High Priest, who is continually interceding for us. Through the hands of the Son and the Spirit, God the Father not only opens Himself to us (incarnation), He also draws us to His heart (sanctification), like in a hug. Do our prayers and songs reflect this understanding?

Event and lifestyle – Especially in the Old Testament, there is a strong connection between worshipping God and practicing righteousness, between action and attitude. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos spoke out for treatment of the oppressed, mercy, and justice, over *acts* of worship and sacrifice, which the Israelites were performing without their hearts engaged (Isa. 1:11-17; Jer. 22:15-17; Hosea 6:4-6; Amos 4:4-5; 5:4-27). When we participate in worship, God wants our whole heart, and the evidence of this will be our *lifestyle*, how we love our neighbor.

Aimless yet full of meaning – The Westminster Shorter Catechism says that man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Much like child’s play, worship has no goal. It is an end in itself: glorifying and enjoying God.

Engaging our whole being – The greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30), and this is a good description of worship. In *Experiential Worship*, author Bob Rognlien expounds on each of these categories:

Biblical Term	Human Trait	Response in Worship	Historical Emphasis
Heart	Volitional	What we choose	Methodist/Baptist/Evangelical
Soul	Emotional	What we feel	Pentecostal/Charismatic
Mind	Intellectual	What we think	Lutheran/Reformed/Bible Church
Strength	Physical	What we do	Orthodox/Catholic/Anglican

II. Why do we worship in community?

Worship is one way we live out our identity as the body of Christ. In *Liturgical Theology*, author Simon Chan argues that worship is what “makes or realizes the church” as God’s people, Christ’s body (p. 46). In other words, God works through worship to form the church, draw it together, and send it out into the world on mission.

Worship is:

Upward – connects us with God and is a response to Him

Inward – promotes growth and love between members as all partake of God’s grace together (Phil. 1:3-8)

Outward – proclaims God’s glory and grace to unbelievers (Ps. 96:1-3; 1 Cor. 14:24-25)

There is something wonderful about gathering together with a large group of believers to worship God. However, worship in smaller groups (community groups, youth groups) is also special. One thing that makes these times unique is the relationships shared. In my youth group, we knew each other personally and had worked side by side serving God together, and this added an intimate dimension to our worship.

III. What does worship in community look like?

- Everybody is engaged and able to participate – adults, kids, different ethnicities, etc.
- The goal is a “journey” that flows, but in a relational setting there are interruptions (especially with kids!), and some don’t participate as much; that’s okay – love is shown, and the Spirit leads
- Different elements may include prayer, Scripture, singing (with music, or a cappella), dancing, shouting, creeds, art, painting, poetry, stories, silence, and commitment
- People may express sorrow, anger, tears, joy, etc. (all found in the Psalms); emotions are generally suppressed in our culture, but we should pay attention to them and be genuine
- The worship time may be led by multiple people; it may even be decentralized and spontaneous where one person starts a song a cappella and then someone else prays, and so on
- Horizontal relationships are engaged in other ways as people minister, pray for each other, etc.
- The time is planned, but not really controlled; people are okay with moments of silence and are responding to God without being self-conscious, knowing they are loved
- People come to a point of being captivated by Christ, in awe of His beauty and righteousness

IV. Resources

1. Books: *Christ-Centered Worship*, *Leading in Prayer*, *Alternative Worship*, *The Worship Sourcebook*, *Valley of Vision*, hymnal, Psalter
2. My website: www.upwardworship.com
 - a. Click on Song Charts for chord charts (email me about the password)
 - b. Click on Resources for a worship idea sheet, websites, books, etc.
3. At www.1christian.net you can pay \$4 per month to access all user-uploaded chord charts
I have some free chord books and word books in hard copy for those who want to commit to this
4. Nights of worship and training
5. Attachments: how to plan a worship time; engaging the senses in worship; the worship idea sheet; Christ-centered worship resources
6. I am available for brainstorming, additional materials, whatever
7. Note: nobody has to play guitar!

V. Discussion questions (get together with leaders from two other community groups and focus on each of the three groups, one at a time)

First, reflect on where your group is at now in terms of worship.

1. On a scale of 1 (not even thought about it) to 10 (fully engaged), what role has worship played in your community group (CG)? Why?
2. What are your personal fears or concerns as a leader that might be preventing you from incorporating worship in your CG?
3. What practical barriers make it difficult to have a worship time in your CG?

Now brainstorm with your partner CG leaders on how you could approach some of these issues. Some questions that might be helpful are:

1. What types of people do you have in your community group? (e.g., young/old, ethnicity, expressive/reserved)
2. How can you serve and include all the group members in worship? (e.g., stuff that engages kids, multi-lingual)
3. What talents do the group members have, which could be used in a group worship time?
4. Who in your community group is willing and able to organize creatively? How can you encourage and equip them so that they can organize or lead a worship time?
5. How much time are you spending on each component of CG? Where might you be able to schedule a 10-15 minute time of worship?