

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Youth Ministry Academy

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SESSION 10

Youth Ministry Discipleship: Worship

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Youth Ministry Discipleship: Worship

SESSION OVERVIEW

An Exercise in Belonging

Worship as a Response to Our Culture

Practicing Worship

Worship-centered Teaching

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- articulate a holistic definition of worship.
- weave your definition of worship through the ministry to, with, and among young people.
- understand the various movements in worship.
- teach based on worship-centered principles.

INTRODUCTION

This session explores the nature of worship as a Christian discipline. Not only is this discipline a necessary part of a healthy Christian life, it is also an essential part of a healthy ministry to young people.

AN EXERCISE IN BELONGING



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Reflect on the places you grew up by answering these questions about your home village, town, city, or country. Are there any festivals, celebrations, customs, or traditions unique to your area? Are there words or phrases unique to the people who live in your area? Is there a language all your own, a unique set of words or phrases someone outside your area would never know? Language is a way we can know we belong to a place and a people. Is there something in your town's history or your part of the country that helps define you as a group of people? Are there names, places, dates, or stories important to you that may have gone unnoticed or unappreciated everywhere else? As you think about the traditions, unique languages, and local history, we understand these are powerful ways in which you and your community belong together. They are all a part of your shared history, your collective memory.

Now think about the **Church. Are** there traditions and customs we intuitively know about? We don't have to explain these customs to each other, we just know. How about Communion? What about a Good Friday service, a Maundy Thursday service, or an anointing with oil? Some of the things we do in the regular rhythm of being the Church make no sense to those people looking in from the outside. But we know and understand, because we already belong; we are part of the history.

Are there words and phrases we use on a regular basis such as "I'm saved" "washed in the blood" "the blood of the Lamb" or "born again"? What about the word grace? Do we have a shared history? Do those of us who are members of this global Kingdom known as the Church have any events in our shared past that bind us together? We do! What are some events in our recent history that are reasons we belong together? Keep pushing it back, back now into the pages of the Bible.

The Bible is an incredible collection of shared history and collective memory of God's presence and interaction with his creation especially humankind. The Bible and all its stories is our story; our belonging to someone bigger than ourselves. Do we know the story of those who chose to follow Jesus throughout even in the face of many different challenges? Do we know our own story well enough to tell it? So often the people around us, the people not yet aware of our story have questions about life, about the nature of our God, about Jesus. Sadly, often the people of God don't seem willing or able to respond.

You are working with a generation of young people who don't mind that you have an organization that has standards or a statement of belief. They want to belong to a group that gives them an identity. What is that identity? We are the people of God.

WORSHIP AS A RESPONSE TO OUR CULTURE



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The truth of the matter is this era, with all of its good and bad, is a perfect time for the Church to be the Church. It is time for us to reintroduce ourselves to the world as the people of God, a people of worship.

Worship; what a word. In order to make our mark in society, the Church must recapture worship's thorough, practical, and holistic meaning. We are in danger of missing the point. I believe the Church's place in society is at risk. Churches aren't very often the major, society-shaping forces they used to be. We are frighteningly close to being a non-issue and our ability to influence and flavor the culture around us may be dependent on our ability to recapture a healthy, holistic, and biblical definition of the word worship.

How does the Bible describe or define worship? There are several Hebrew and Greek words translated as worship. In the New Testament alone there are four significant words translated as worship. Sometimes we don't have all the words we need to communicate a biblical concept. We miss out on the true meaning the original authors intended.

Take for example, one of our most treasured and often-quoted verses in all of Scripture, Romans 12:1: "Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship." Look at the first word, "Therefore." It's obvious this word is referring back to something said or written earlier. What is it referring to? This statement refers back to Romans 9, 10, and 11, where Paul walks through God's stormy relationship with His chosen people, Israel; Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, and all who would follow. Paul mentions Jacob, Esau, and then Moses. God's love and devotion to His people is the common thread through this entire story despite Israel's best efforts to rebel and frustrate the God of promise and of the covenant.

Paul writes of a God who refuses to give up on His people. Nowhere else is God the "God of the second chance" like He is with the people of Israel. Finally, God redraws the boundaries of His kingdom in such a way as to include all who would call on the name of the Lord, both Jews and Gentiles. And still, God demonstrates the eternal love He has for Israel. "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people" (Romans 10:21). In chapter 11, Paul, a self-proclaimed Jew among Jews, still hopes, prays, and yearns for the redemption of his people. Paul, awash in this amazement, says finally in Romans 12:1: "Therefore, I urge you . . ."



True worship arises because God has called and continues to call His people, the Church. As an echo, the Church's worship directed to God is a response to His gifts. Crucial to worship is the Church's ability to remember and recognize God's gifts throughout history. But those stories are not just God's stories. They are the stories of the Church and they are our stories. Not until we as members of the Church rediscover our story, the story of the dynamic relationship between God and His people, can we properly respond to God and His gifts. Without our story we cannot be living sacrifices; without our story we cannot worship.

Can we be honest? Much of what is now called worship isn't. Worship cannot be self-centered. God is not the ultimate vending machine. While God the eternal Father does seek to comfort His children, He is still God and still worthy of worship even if our needs aren't met. What seems to be moving Paul to tears in Romans 12 is not so much what God has done for Paul, but what God has done for mankind as can be discovered in God's salvation history as recorded in the pages of the Bible. Each of us has some idea of God's graciousness to us, but our perspective is hopelessly and helplessly limited.

Youth workers have to teach our story; tell and retell our story, or young people will not truly know Him. If you don't tell the story, they won't know how to be people of worship. They won't know how to respond. Worship is about the story. It's about understanding and responding to all God has done throughout the chapters of our history.

Worship Is Not a Religious Exercise; It Is a Relationship

Note Paul's emphasis on living sacrifices as opposed to the dead sacrifices of the Old Testament. It is not just in the dying but living in relationship with Him we become acceptable sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. We continually give our lives to God. We no longer decide our future. Instead, we rely totally on God to lead us and guide us. We give God the totality of our lives. How can we give our all not knowing what the future holds? The answer lies in the relationship. In what has been since the beginning of time a dynamic and living relationship, God has sought each of us out. He has interacted with us, built a heritage, and a story that continues to this day. It is a story that continues to be written throughout our lives as we live in relationship with this God of relationship.

Worship Is a Lifestyle

Paul says, "This is your spiritual worship." It is crucial at this point to recognize the act of giving ourselves over completely as living sacrifices is equated with the Greek word *latreia*, which includes the idea of service or religious homage.

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With this definition in mind, Paul writes that believers truly worship when their lives are lived entirely in grateful response to God's nature, to His purpose, and to His good gifts that He gives to His people. Eugene Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases 12:1:

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him.

The implications are clear: reclaiming our story enables believers to recapture a way of life dormant since the earliest days of the Church. The proper response to God will necessarily result in a particular, sacrificial way of life. True worship is the recovery and repossession of our story and is a distinctive and peculiar way of life. Look at this snapshot of our ancestors in the Early Church:

Everyone around was in awe. All those wonders and signs done by the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold everything they owned and pooled their resources, so that each person's need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the temple, followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw and every day their number grew, as God added those who were saved (Acts 2:42-47, *The Message*).

The climate is right, the time is right for a rebirth of an Acts 2 Church. Living life in worship, day in and day out with consistency, we experience the truth of a loving God. Our spiritual hunger is met by relationships with God and each other in the Church. God has invited us to belong to His family. That's worth celebrating.

PRACTICING WORSHIP



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Perhaps the best way to understand the true meaning of worship still rests in practicing it in the middle of a worshiping community. In this sense the term practicing does not mean a rehearsal of what we do, or a strategy to become masters at worship. Instead the term practicing means we give ourselves over to the structure and form that guide our worship until we are shaped and conditioned to experience and respond to God with our whole heart. We do not master worship; instead we allow worship to bring us into a posture of obedience where we serve God.

Worship also means attributing worth or respect to God, which comes in many styles and shapes throughout the world. Worship can be used to describe both personal devotion and community celebration, the gathering of people as a Christian assembly. Author James White, in *Introduction to Christian Worship*, notes we usually treat our assembling for worship as merely a mechanical necessity, but coming together in Christ's name is itself an important part of common worship. These gatherings can be quite diverse. From the early history of the Church there have been a number of different classical worship traditions. Regardless of the different approaches to the worship of God, worship should bring us into the presence of God and awaken us to God's love so we can respond with our whole lives.

In order to practice worship we need to keep in mind some key elements worship services share whether formal or informal. The elements may look different in various cultural contexts, but they remain crucial for sound worship leadership with young people.

First, worship incorporates a basic sense of space or place. While worship might happen anywhere, often we are called to fashion a space people find helpful to their worship experience. This space may be a church sanctuary, a classroom, a meeting hall, or outdoors. The key challenge is to arrange the space so the focus is on God. This space might include special altars and furniture, religious symbols and artwork, or music played and sung. The goal remains to structure this sacred space so young people know they are in a place that signals a sense of reverence and expectation that God will do something.

Second, almost all worship has a sense of timing, rhythm, or flow. Whether an open praise service or a formal, liturgical, worship setting, almost all worship tries to bring people through a series of actions into the presence of God. While


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small changes might be made, the overall flow remains important, whether it is free worship or liturgical worship. Free worship describes congregations that like to keep a portion of the worship service spontaneous and open. The term liturgical often describes congregations that have a set, often printed, worship structure they follow in a regular pattern. Regardless of the level of spontaneity and freedom included, some blended worship services try to incorporate both. Historically almost all congregations still follow some basic structure aimed to help people actually enter into worship. There are basic acts, from the beginning to the end of the worship service, that provide a rhythm or flow to worship.

Basic Acts That Structure Worship

- *Entering into God's presence:* Actions such as singing and praying designed to invite people into God's presence.
- *Hearing God's Word:* Actions such as hearing Scripture read and proclaimed so we hear Christ's message for us.
- *Responding and celebrating with thanksgiving:* God's Word invites our response, be it at an altar or through the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Responses might include times of commitment and expression of thanksgiving to God for what we have heard or for the chance to be in the presence of God.
- *Sending:* Finally worship includes some form of dismissal that calls us to love and serve God's world; the command to live out our worship throughout the week.

Finally almost all worship requires dedicated, authentic leadership. Youth leaders learn early the goal of leading worship revolves around getting young people to focus on God, not on the worship leader. Nevertheless, sound, spiritually grounded leadership remains a key concern. One does not have to be unduly outgoing to be a good worship leader. Instead a good worship leader recognizes the need to focus more on the rhythm of worship than on personal abilities and the need to direct the worshippers' attention toward God.

Regardless of our role in worship we need to remember the focus must be on God. We can have a beautiful worship setting, great technology, excellent music, powerful preaching, dynamic leadership, and still miss the goal of worship. If people do not enter into the presence of God; if they are not inspired to live out worship in their daily lives; we have failed to understand the basic purpose and rhythm of worship.

WORSHIP-CENTERED TEACHING



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Beyond the practice of worship, how do we prepare youth to live a life anchored in the true direction of worship? Can we relive the story of God, respond relationally, or live a worship-centered life? Can our teaching resemble our worship? Can God's story found in the pages of the Bible really influence the way you are doing youth ministry? The Bible has great transformational power. So, how do you teach the Bible?

Finding Ourselves in the Story

Sadly, young people often do not receive the full story of God; only those bits and pieces the youth worker feels are important. Without the wonders of technology we have at our disposal to transmit biblical truth, how did the ancient Israelites teach faith to their children? They told stories. They told them in a particular order so as to build their children from the inside out.

Make a timeline. Let that timeline represent the storyline in the Bible. Take a few moments to put Creation at the beginning and the Second Coming at the end. Now, answer the following questions: If it were your responsibility to tell the story of God to someone who had never heard it, what stories would you believe to be the most crucial? We want to completely cover what it means to be the people of God. Take a few minutes and write these on the timeline doing your best to try to keep the stories in order.

Your timeline should show a gap between the end of biblical time and the Second Coming. Do you know what belongs in that space? We do. That is where we live now, you and I, as we minister to young people. Why is that so important? Your young people don't know they belong on this timeline with the likes of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ, all members of the family of God. If we'll do this thing right, we can show them how they can be a part of God's story; the story that continues to be written through us by God.

More Active than Passive

Worship-centered teaching is in its essence more active than passive. The traditional lecture style is a passive form of teaching and learning. The lecture style is not always the best way to get your point across. Psychologist Edgar Dale notes we learn more as our activities get us closer to direct, purposeful, and personal experience. We learn:



5-10%	verbal or written
25%	media
40-60%	role-play
80-90%	experience

Edgar Dale's work is of monumental importance to us who teach. When we find a way for our young people to experience the truth of the lesson in a hands-on way, then they take home eighty to ninety percent of the lesson. It is not enough to say, "As Christians, you should go and feed the poor." Instead, after you teach that lesson, go and help to feed the poor! Sometimes the best thing you can do for young people is to cancel regularly scheduled activities and give your youth an opportunity to experience the truth of a lesson. You'll be amazed at what you can teach and what your young people can learn.

More We-Oriented, than I-Oriented.

The focus of worship-centered teaching is not on the individual but on the community. It is this kind of emphasis that will tie our students to the traditions of the Church and the depth of the Scripture. This is the perfect time to say, "Here is a place to belong and here is how we believe." This doesn't mean we seek to take advantage of young peoples' desire to belong, creating youth who appropriate our beliefs but fail to live them out. Rather we can provide a place where students feel welcomed and accepted. When the students make the choice to enter our group, we can say, "This is who we are and this is how we believe." Worship-centered teaching does not apologize for having distinctive beliefs.

Another aspect of being more we-oriented than I-oriented is to assist teens with their devotional life by focusing on personal and community practices. We all know a regular devotional time is essential to the development of faith. Our young people often aren't equipped to be the final authority on the interpretation of Scripture. We do them a great disservice when we look at them solely for personal interpretation and individual application. We need to make sure they also encounter Scripture in community with people who can serve as sound references and who can guide them to live the story through accountability and guidance. Only as we model worship-centered teaching for our students, and provide opportunities for them to join us, will they come to understand and find their place in God's story.

APPLICATION



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1. Construct a timeline of biblical history on a large wall in the place you minister to your young people. Make sure to leave a large space for the pictures you will take of your students. Place these pictures on the wall in the timeline of God's ever-unfolding story.
2. Attend your local worship service, identify the basic movements that go on in the service designed to bring people closer to God and send them back into the world.
3. Read Nehemiah 8 and 9. Compare and contrast this passage of Scripture with the Romans 9-12 passage we studied in this session.
4. Review the lessons you have taught over the past few months or years. Have you been telling and retelling the story? Have you been bouncing from topic to topic? In light of what you have read, what plan do you need to implement to guide your teaching to ensure we cover the entire story with your students?

EXAM



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1. The Bible is a collection of shared history and memory about God's presence.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. The Bible provides a limited definition of worship.
 - A. True
 - B. False

3. Worship is about understanding and responding to all God has done throughout the chapters of our history.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. Worship also means attributing worth or respect to God.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. Worship can mean both public celebration and personal devotion.
 - A. True
 - B. False

6. Worship should _____.
 - A. bring us into the presence of God
 - B. awaken us to God's love
 - C. help us to respond with our whole lives
 - D. all of the above

7. Worship calls for _____.
 - A. space oriented towards God
 - B. rhythm or flow
 - C. dedicated leadership
 - D. all of the above

8. Basic acts that should define the act of worship include _____.
 - A. entering God's presence
 - B. hearing God's Word
 - C. responding and celebrating with thanksgiving
 - D. sending
 - E. all of the above



9. Sometimes the best thing you can do for young people is to cancel regularly scheduled activities and give your youth an opportunity to experience the truth of a lesson.
- A. True
 - B. False
10. One of the real challenges of worship-centered teaching is making sure youth receive the full story of God.
- A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



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Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. What are some events in our church that are reasons we belong together?
2. How does your understanding of Romans 12:1 impact the way you lead worship for youth?
3. Do you know the biblical story well enough to help your students find their place in it? What are some ways you have helped your students find their place?
4. Does your youth group see themselves as part of the continually unfolding God story? Why or why not?
5. What are some concrete ways you can begin to change your teaching to reflect a worship-centered teaching approach?