

# LIFEGROUP LESSON



## Why and How We Worship Romans 12:1-2; Psalm 108:1-5

### TIPS FOR DISCUSSION FACILITATOR

Ensure that the aim is first to understand the text and then to make it meaningful and relevant. The discussion questions provided are intended to bring out the relevance for today.

Begin with a prayer for the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Encourage everyone to participate in the discussion.

Begin the discussion by reading the sermon passage (where applicable), and discuss about its overall meaning by asking what could be the key focuses/emphases in that particular passage.

Spend appropriate amount of time on each question with as many members as possible making a contribution. At the end of each discussion the leader should summarise the main points that have arisen and direct the group towards making them applicable in their individual lives.

A balance must be kept between ascertaining what the Bible teaches and what are the opinions of participants. So the facilitator should make sure that there is an understanding of the passage before questions are raised.

## MESSAGE OUTLINE

1. Why We Worship (Romans 12:1-2)
2. How We Worship (Psalm 108:1-5)
  - (a) Our Spiritual Postures in Worship
  - (b) Our Physical Expressions in Worship

### Understanding of what Worship is

(Adapted from “Monday Morning Worship” by Kent Wilson)

Worship has always been a very visual and active term. The biblical words for worship come from the royal ceremonies and courts, and they describe how subjects were to relate to their king. The words translated “worship” actually mean “to bow down or prostrate oneself” or “to kiss the hand”. There is even a word for worship that means “to serve”.

As a visual concept, worship involves every part of our being—our physical posture, our will, and our emotions. Worship is not just words or music or kneeling. It is multiple parts of our lives focused simultaneously towards giving honour, reverence, respect—and even awe—to God our King for who He is and what He has done. It is the awareness of and natural reaction to the presence of God in our midst. The mind and the body, the mouth and the heart are all involved. As speaker George Mallone remarked rather succinctly, “When Christ comes again, we will not sit.”

R.C. Sproul writes in Table Talk:

*“If people find worship boring and irrelevant, it can only mean they have no sense of the presence of God in it. When we study the action of worship in Scripture and the testimony of church history, we discover a variety of human responses to the sense of the presence of God. Some people tremble in terror, falling with their face to the ground; others weep in mourning; some are exuberant in joy; still others are reduced to a pensive silence. Though the responses differ, one reaction we never find is boredom. It is impossible to be bored in the presence of God if you know that He is there.”*

### Discussion for Point 1: Why We Worship (Romans 12:1-2).

- It has often been noted that in all of creation, only humankind possesses the idea of “worship”. Why do you think this is significant, i.e. what do you think this tells us about the way we have been created by God? “We do not choose whether to worship, but we do choose who or what we worship.” Do you agree with this statement? Give reasons for your answer. Other than the One True God, what are some of the possible things people can choose to worship? What do you think can happen when people worship any other thing or person, other than God Himself, i.e. how would God view this, and how would this affect the way people live? “Worship includes the songs we sing to God, but it is much more than that.” Do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.
- Why do you think it is important that the God we worship is the Almighty Creator, i.e. He is a great and sovereign God? Do you think

He would still deserve our worship if He is not great? On the other hand, why do you think it is important that God is the Gracious Saviour, i.e. He is a good and loving God? Similarly, do you think He still deserves our worship if He is not a good God? “A great god who is not good will be a tyrant to be feared, while a good god who is not great is merely a friend to be appreciated. Only when God is both good and great will He deserve our utmost worship.” Do you agree with this assertion? Give reasons for your answer. On a scale of -5 (only a good God) to 5 (only a great God), with 0 being a good balance between the two, how do you think you view God in your worship? Explain your rating. How can we help one another in the LG to have a more balanced view of God in our worship as a community?

### Discussion for Point 2: How We Worship (Psalm 108:1-5).

(a) Our Spiritual Postures in Worship

(b) Our Physical Expressions in Worship

- What are some of your feelings or thoughts towards God when you worshipped Him during the previous weekend service? Why do you think it is important that our spiritual posture (i.e. our attitudes) before God must be right when we worship, i.e. what can happen if we worship God without the right heart posture? Read Matthew 15:8-9 and John 4:21-24. What do you think are some possible wrong attitudes people may have while they are worshipping God? On the other hand, what are some proper heart postures we need to have when we worship God, for example having a reverential humility, etc? As a LG, how can we help one another set the right focus during our time of worshipping God as a LG community?
- What are some physical expressions of worship that believers may sometimes have when they are worshipping God? Do you think it is appropriate to have such physical expressions when we worship God as a community? Give reasons for your answer. What do you think the believers were trying to express towards God through these physical gestures (such as the raising of hands, kneeling down or clapping)? Why do you think it is important for believers to be able to worship God through bodily expressions, i.e. without unnecessary inhibitions? On the other hand, does this mean that we do not need to consider the people around us when we express our worship to God through bodily gestures? Explain your answer. As a LG community, in what ways do you think our corporate worship can be more holistic?

*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.  
Do not conform to the pattern of this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.  
Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is  
- his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

~ Romans 12:1-2 ~

## Appendix A (For general reading and reflection)

### Beyond Lone-Ranger Worship

*Why two (or more) are better than one*

By Steven Fry,

(Adapted from Discipleship Journal, <http://www.navpress.com/magazines/archives/article.aspx?id=10509>)

A palpable excitement hung in the air. People were dressed in their best, and a low buzz of expectant whispers echoed throughout the concert hall. It was my first symphony concert, and I was drinking it in. One by one, the finest classical musicians in San Francisco took their seats, instruments at the ready.

Then they began to play. I grimaced. It sounded more like rush hour than Mozart. The sound emanating from that stage was a cacophony of a hundred separate instruments tuning up. Each musician played without paying any attention to the others, and it sounded *bad*.

Then the conductor took the stand. The instruments fell silent. A hush came over the audience as he raised his baton. At the downbeat, an ocean of harmony cascaded into the auditorium. The musicians now played *in concert* with each other. *Together* they were an orchestra. *Together* they expressed sounds that simply couldn't be created individually.

You might be surprised to know that Jesus called His people to be a symphony. In **Matthew 18:19**, He said, "If two of you on earth *agree* about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name there am I with them" (emphasis mine).

The Greek word for *agree* in this passage is *sumphoneo*, from which we derive our word *symphony*. When we are in agreement before the Lord in our lives and ministries—and in our worship together—the combined effect is like that of a symphony. Together, the unique "notes" of each life comprise an orchestra that magnifies God's glory in a way no individual can.

Unfortunately, our culture is in love with "solo artists." Independence is one of the hallmarks of our society, and we guard it like a she-bear protects her cubs. The high premium we place on self-reliance pushes many facets of community to the periphery—including worshiping together. Worship with others can quietly become just one weekend option among many.

The hectic pace of life also makes it easy to view the gathering of God's people more as a filling station where we refuel our souls than a community we draw from and invest in. Secretly, we may begin to wonder, *Is worshiping with other believers really that important? Can't we praise and glorify God just as easily alone?*

As we'll discover, worshiping together is about far more than simply singing a hymn or chorus with our friends in church. Worshiping God with other believers is His idea; it should be important to us because it matters to Him. In addition, worship enriches our faith. Let's consider why joining other Christians in worship is so important and the benefits we experience when we do.

### Why We Worship Together

**It's God's idea.** A survey of the first five books of the Bible should convince us that God was very concerned with the way His people worshiped Him. God prescribed all the elements and the order of worship—from the construction of the tabernacle (and later the temple) down to the smallest details of the priests' vestments.

As the budding Israelite nation prepared to possess its promised land, Moses reminded the people that they were not to worship as other nations did: offering sacrifices wherever they wanted. Instead, they were commanded to worship in a place that God would designate (**Deuteronomy 12**).

Eventually, that place was identified as Jerusalem, and the entire nation was commanded to come together three times a year to worship the Lord. The Israelites' worship was inherently communal, an event that encompassed all of God's people.

The idea of worshipping as you pleased, by yourself, would have been utterly foreign to the Israelites. In fact, such worship was often the result of rebellion and stubborn independence. When the Israelites did stray spiritually, their worship as a nation was frequently leavened with ideas and practices from the pagan peoples who surrounded them.

God inevitably used His prophets and judgment to chasten His people when they chose idolatry, and He always sought to bring them back to worshipping Him as a people (**Hosea 2:2–23, Joel 2:12–13, Amos 4–5, Luke 13:34**).

Worshipping with other believers is not always convenient. But if you think it's hard to make it to church on some Sundays, imagine the inconvenience for the Israelites! For most, the three worship holidays meant *weeks* away from home as they trekked to Jerusalem. God seems entirely comfortable requiring such sacrifices for the purpose of gathering His people in worship.

**Worshipping together reflects God's nature.** The concept of autonomous worship also needs to be scrutinized carefully in the light of God's nature.

God is a Trinity, a *community* of Persons. Imagine it: There has never been a moment in all eternity where a single, unrelated being has existed. One of the implications of this truth is this: The American ideal of the self-reliant individual is an illusion. If God is three Persons, what makes us think that we are singularly complete in and of ourselves?

God has made us fundamentally *incomplete*. We are designed to find our completion in relationship with Him and with others in the family of faith (**1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:1–16**). Together we form a community in symphony with one another.

As we worship together, we experience God in a way that fundamentally reflects His relational nature: community. No matter how ecstatic or thrilling our private worship moments may be, they can never replace being in His presence with other believers.

**It brings God joy to gather His people together.** The prophet Zephaniah captured the holy joy that pulses through God's heart when He dwells among a grateful, praising people.

*Shout for joy, daughter of Zion, rejoice with all your heart. . . . Yahweh is in your midst, exulting with joy over you; dancing with shouts of joy for you. —Zephaniah 3:14, 17, NJB*

Imagine the Father dancing among His people while they praise Him together! That's the joyful picture Zephaniah paints. Clearly, God takes great delight in His people gathered together.

The closing verses of this book reinforce this idea. Zephaniah concludes with a promise that demonstrates God's desire to gather His people, especially those who've been isolated and separated from each other because of political oppression, exile, or physical infirmities.

*At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you; I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. . . . At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home.—Zephaniah 3:19-20*

God wants His people to be together with Him—to be *home* with Him. To worship as a community of faith *is* to be "home" in a very real sense. We are but "aliens and strangers" here (**1 Peter 2:11**); but when we sing,

shout, and rejoice together (**Zephaniah 3:14**), we rehearse for life in our heavenly home. There, all the tribes and peoples and nations who've worshiped Him throughout the centuries will do so as one (**Revelation 7:9–17**). Worshiping alone simply cannot offer this glimpse of what's coming.

## The Benefits of Worshiping Together

Not only is it God's desire that we worship Him together, but we experience several benefits when we do so.

**Worshiping together nourishes and sustains our faith.** In the Old Testament, corporate worship gave the Israelites a regular opportunity to embrace and celebrate their shared identity as God's chosen people. It reminded them of who they were and bolstered their faith.

Worshiping together nourishes our faith too. The author of Hebrews understood the importance of gathering together to remember what God has done for us. In chapter **10**, he exhorts his readers not to drift into self-absorbed spirituality: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (v. **25**).

This verse is frequently quoted as a stand-alone reminder of the importance of fellowship. To properly understand this command, however, we need to examine its broader context.

In this passage, meeting together is the last of four concrete responses to the forgiveness we have in Christ. "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart . . . Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess . . . Let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds" (**Hebrews 10:22–24**), and finally, "Let us not give up meeting together" (v. **25**).

Note the repeated emphasis on responding to God together: "Let us." The writer of Hebrews understood that when we come together as a people, worshiping the God who has forgiven us, we're able to encourage one another to press on spiritually, to persevere, to maintain our hope.

Apart from worshiping together, how can we hope to pursue Him steadfastly? When we neglect this priority, we cut ourselves off from the faith-sustaining work God does through His gathered people.

**Worshiping together gives us a unique opportunity to experience Jesus.** Scripture says that the Lord is enthroned on the praises of His people (**Psalms 22:3**). In part, that means He allows His presence to be sensed among a worshiping church. Where we come together, Jesus is actually in our midst singing praise to the Father with us!

Unfortunately, we misapply this powerful truth when we assume that our worship itself brings the presence of the Lord. Instead, I believe it's more accurate to describe our worship together as a joyous *response* to His presence, not something that summons God because of *our* passion or intensity. Worship is not about God's response to us—it's all about our response to Him for who He already is and what He's already done on our behalf.

David understood the joy that comes when we praise God with other believers: "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord'" (**Psalms 122:1**). I believe we experience the glory of His presence uniquely in this symphony of worship. No matter how sweet our personal communion is with the Lord, we will discover new aspects of His character and love when we worship Him in the assembly of the saints.

**Worshiping together fuels our passion for His purposes.** God designed us to have purpose in life. We are to "be for the praise of His glory" (**Ephesians 1:12**). The very reason for our existence is to reveal God's worthiness. He wants every aspect of our lives to reflect Him more and more.

When Jesus instructed His disciples to wait for the promised Holy Spirit (**Acts 1:8**), He was not calling them to ascertain the operating procedures for their mission; He was first summoning them to an encounter with the Holy Spirit, out of which their mission would flow. The commission to be His witnesses was ignited—and thereafter sustained (**Acts 4:23–31**)—in an encounter with the Holy Spirit as they worshiped and prayed together. Such times renew our vision for ministry and rekindle our desire to glorify God.

I lived in the San Francisco area for many years, and I had the privilege of participating in several evangelistic outreaches. As an ardent young disciple, I remember driving into the city one morning, gathering my courage at Union Square, and praising God at the top of my voice—all by myself! Bold, maybe, but not too effective. Rather than fuel a greater passion for mission, it left me feeling intimidated and alone.

Years later, I found myself worshiping God again at Union Square—this time with 700 other believers! I could feel faith rising with every song. Many found new life in Christ in the days of outreach that followed. Worshiping with one another bathed our joint sense of mission with fresh fire.

Our culture has enshrined the ideal of the lone ranger. But that's not God's plan for our worship. Instead, He longs to be among us as we offer our praises to Him. The result? Encouragement in our faith, deepened intimacy with Jesus, and a renewed passion to pursue His purposes—not to mention the joyous camaraderie that comes as we journey with like-minded pilgrims—*together*.

## Appendix B (For leaders and mature believers)

### A Brief History of Christian Worship

*The new forms of worship breaking ground today have their roots in the past*

By NavPress,

(Adapted from Discipleship Journal, <http://www.navpress.com/magazines/archives/article.aspx?id=12766>)

People often desire to understand their own past. For Christians, that curiosity extends beyond family history to the history of the Church. In a recent poll conducted by *Christian History* magazine, the question asked most often was, "How did people in the early Church worship?" The answer to this question is not historical trivia but a window to our worship of the future.

### New Testament Worship

In New Testament times, worship was a response to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. **First Pet. 2:9** states, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, *that you may declare the praises of him* who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (emphasis added).

That last phrase expresses the New Testament principle that *worship is a response to the gospel*. Here are the reasons for worship: the living, dying, and rising of Jesus; the forgiveness of sin that comes from the work of Christ; and the ultimate overthrow of evil that results from the Christ-Event.

While Peter addresses the main reason *why* the Church praises God, Luke gives us the earliest description of *how* the New Testament Church worshiped. In **Acts 2:42** Luke describes early Christian worship: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Here, Luke states the focus of primitive worship (apostolic teaching and breaking of bread) and the context of that worship (prayer and fellowship). This picture is expanded by other writers to include singing. For example, Paul admonishes believers to "speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord" (**Eph 5:19**).

Let's take a look at worship throughout the history of the Church, using the New Testament *why* and *how* of worship as the standard.

### Early Christian Worship to 300 A.D.

The Church in the first three centuries gets very high marks for its faithfulness to the biblical tradition of worship. Its worship was rooted in the historical work of Jesus Christ and the hope of the new Heaven and the new earth. Worship, like that in **Revelation 4** and **5**, was an experience of Heaven, a foretaste of heavenly worship, a songfest with the angels and archangels who surround the heavenly throne and sing the new song.

The *spirit* of worship, like that of the New Testament, was rooted in the living, dying, and rising of Christ. In particular it stressed the theme of the overthrow of the powers of evil.

For example, in the great prayer of thanksgiving said over bread and wine the minister prayed, "When He was betrayed to voluntary suffering that He might destroy death, and break the bonds of the devil . . ." Here, in this record left by Hippolytus in *The Apostolic Tradition* (215 A.D.), we encounter what has been named the *Christus Victor* theme of the work of Christ. Christ is the victor over sin and death. He is the Lord of the Universe. In worship, the Church praises God for the defeat of Satan and for the freedom from the power of evil He has secured for believers by the death and resurrection of His Son.

To understand *how* Christians worshiped in the early Church we turn to Justin Martyr, who described worship in a document written to the Emperor Titus around 150 A.D.:

*And on the day called Sunday there is a meeting in the place of those who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president in a discourse urges and invites us to the imitation of these noble things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers. And, as before, when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the president similarly sends up prayers and thanksgiving to the best of his ability, and the congregation assents, saying the Amen; the distribution, and reception of the consecrated [elements] by each one, takes place and they are sent to the Absent.*

Here is the basic form of early Christian worship:

- The Gathering
- Scripture readings
- Sermon
- Prayer
- Bread and wine (Communion)
- Prayers of thanksgiving
- The Amen
- Distribution of the elements
- Bread and wine sent to the absent

Worship in the second century, like that of the New Testament, was twofold. It proclaimed the praise of God for the work of His Son through Scripture (apostolic teaching) and through bread and wine. While this account does not mention singing, we know from other descriptions that the believers sang together.

## The Ancient Church: 300–600

After the conversion of Constantine in the beginning of the fourth century, the Church continued to worship in the spirit of the New Testament—celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the overthrow of evil. It also maintained the form of New Testament worship: the proclamation of Christ through the reading and preaching of the Word and the enactment of the death and resurrection of Christ at the Table. The Church continued to sing—even singing in the Spirit was a central part of worship. (Singing in the Spirit was a spontaneous singing of praise by the congregation, normally at the worship leader's bidding.) Nevertheless, worship went through some changes in the Constantinian era.

In the first three hundred years of Christianity, congregations met mostly in homes or in houses converted into churches. Most assemblies involved probably thirty to sixty people. In this context worship was characterized by informality and intimacy. After the conversion of Constantine, small worshiping communities became the exception. It was now popular to be Christian. The government gave huge basilicas to the Church which were converted into places of worship. Large churches were built as well. The mega-church movement was born in the fourth century!

In this new context, informality was replaced by formality and intimacy was replaced by theater. Worship became more highly ordered (the term we use to describe this phenomena is liturgical) and more clerical. It centred more around what the clergy did than around what the people did. This change laid the foundation for what took place in the medieval era.

## Worship in the Medieval Era: 600–1500

The trend toward formality, theater, and the clericalization of worship that began in the fourth and fifth centuries continued to develop during the medieval era. Both the spirit and the form of New Testament worship was lost, especially in the late medieval period.

First, the Church took the spirit of worship—the celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ—and turned it into the sacrificial theory of the Eucharist (the conviction that each celebration of the Eucharist is another sacrifice of Christ). Many excesses were associated with this sacrificial theory of the Eucharist, such as the notion that sacrifices could be sold for the dead.

Next, the reading and preaching of the Word of God fell into disuse as the Eucharist became the main event of worship.

Finally, worship was taken away from the people: It was conducted by the priest with no involvement by the congregation. The Mass was said in Latin, which was no longer the common language. Even the singing was done by choirs. The people were now merely spectators at a spectacular program.

## Worship among the Reformed: 16th Century

The Protestant Reformers rightly rebelled against the worship of the medieval era and sought to return worship to the biblical and early Church tradition. The Reformers disdained the sacrificial theory of the Eucharist and regarded the Roman Catholic mass as, in the words of Luther, an abomination. They also sought to return worship to the people. Consequently, Reformation worship was in the language of the people. It restored the reading of the Word of God and preaching, and it restored the singing of psalms, particularly by the congregation.

The Reformers also argued for a recovery of both the spirit and form of early Christian worship. Worship for them was a celebration of God's mighty deed of salvation in Jesus Christ, which was to be proclaimed in both Word and Table.

But they disagreed on the use of the ancient ceremonies in worship, specifically, the ceremonies developed in the fourth and fifth centuries that brought theater to worship. These ceremonies included vestments, processions, candles, the use of incense, the services of the Christian year, and forms of song such as Gregorian chant. Both Luther and his followers and the Anglicans argued that these ceremonials *could* be used in worship because they were not expressly forbidden in Scripture. Calvin and the Anabaptists argued that only that which God prescribes in the New Testament may be used in worship. Hence, Lutherans and Anglicans, drawing from the ancient Church, have been more liturgical while Calvinists and Free Church people have opted for a more simple, nonceremonial worship.

## Worship among Free Church Protestants: 1600–1950

The spirit and the form of worship desired by the Reformers was influenced by the rise of the Enlightenment, which was a rational approach to the Christian faith.

The spirit of worship shifted from a celebration of the death and resurrection to teaching about God from Scripture. And the form of worship among Free Church Protestants during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries focused primarily on the reading and teaching of God's Word, with the celebration of Communion relegated to the background.

However, this pedagogical approach to worship was quite participatory. It involved the people in prayers, the singing of the psalms, and in a regular discussion of the sermon (yes, as part of worship!).

By the end of the eighteenth century this form of worship had grown too intellectual and the people longed for a more feeling-centered experience of worship. The rise of the evangelistic approach to worship swept away the more pedagogical model. The new, evangelistic model, taken from evangelists like Wesley and Finney, emphasized preaching and the invitation to receive Christ. Its order of worship is well known to evangelicals today: singing, preaching, and invitation.

## **Worship since 1950**

A theologian once struck an image of what has been happening in the last half of the century when he said, "Let's face it, our kids are choosing either artistry or ecstasy." Artistry is the desire for more order—the liturgical church, and ecstasy is the desire for more freedom—the charismatic church.

The Liturgical Renewal movement asks for a return to worship as a celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Evangelicals are discovering the celebrative nature of a worship centered around the Table—Communion—and the form of worship given at the Table is beginning to be recognized as necessary to the fullness of worship.

The Charismatic movement has called both Catholics and Protestants to a very important aspect of worship—the recovery of song and of the immediacy of the Holy Spirit in worship. This has brought a new openness to healing, particularly the healing of emotions and relationships.