

# CHAPTER 8, SESSION 32: THE WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

One of the most hotly discussed topics in many churches in recent years has revolved around worship. As the group enters this conversation, you will need to be aware of any history that has caused pain or division in your congregation. Also, be aware that someone in your group may have been hurt in another church in a situation related to worship. This chapter is meant to look deeper than just the form worship takes such as traditional or contemporary, so don't linger on discussions revolving around these forms. Instead, concentrate on the role of corporate worship in the life of a follower of Christ.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ Photocopies of the Handout “Order of Worship” if you plan to use this suggestion
- ☞ Any supplies needed for your worship experience

## OPENING TO GOD [5 minutes]

Have the person who volunteered last week offer their reading as a lead-in to 5 minutes of silence.

At the conclusion of the silence someone in the group may offer a brief prayer, ring a meditation chime, or simply say “Amen.”

## SOUL-TRAINING [10-20 minutes]

This chapter's soul-training exercise moved us through five steps that prepared us for worship, helped us focus during worship and applied what God was calling us to do following worship. If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the questions below to explore these five steps.

1. Were you able to prepare for worship by creating margin, arriving early and entering with holy expectancy? If so, what impact did these steps have on your worship experience?
2. What one aspect of worship did you focus on this week? What did you notice or learn from this intentional focus?
3. What one thing did you feel God was inviting you to do? Have you had an opportunity to respond? If so, what has been the result?

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30-40 minutes]

If you divided into sub-groups for your discussion of the soul-training exercise, you may regroup for your discussion of the chapter. If time is limited, read through the following questions and note which ones you especially want to discuss, and then begin with those questions.

1. The author gives us two false and two true narratives (pp. 170-73). Which of the false narratives is most at work in your life? How can you tell? Do you agree with the true narratives? Why?
2. In summarizing the quote from C. S. Lewis, the author writes, “We need each other, despite our differences. And worship is not about the quality of the performance but the heart of those who worship” (p. 174). How have differences within your worshipping community been a blessing to you? How would you describe the heart of your worshipping community?
3. In his letter to his son, Jacob, the author explains the value and importance of several elements of worship. What did you find most helpful from this section (pp. 177-84)? Why?

4. If you are comfortable, discuss your struggles with worship—the hurt, disappointment, disillusionment or burnout that has made worship difficult for you. Conclude this time with prayer for one another and for anyone struggling to find a worship home.
5. In our current culture it is easy to become a worship consumer. What are the indications that you are more focused on critiquing worship than you are on critiquing your own heart?
6. Read the quote from *Jayber Crow* on pages 184-85. What emotions does this story stir within you? How does it change your perspective of worship, your faith community and your place in that community?

### ENGAGING THE WORD [10-20 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud Psalm 95:1-3:

O come, let us sing to the LORD;  
 let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
 let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!  
 For the LORD is a great God,  
 and a great King above all gods (NRSV).

1. When you read this psalm of David, does it encourage or discourage you regarding your own worship experience? Why?
2. Why do we feel our worship experience needs to match the psalmist's?
3. Have you ever felt the type of joy in worship David is describing? Recount your experience.
4. David's narrative in the psalm is that God is a rock, Lord and King above all gods. What connection is there between David's view of the good and beautiful God and his response in worship?

### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION WITH SOUL-TRAINING [30 minutes]

To help us grasp the beauty and significance of worship, the author writes a letter to his son, Jacob. Drawing on the primary points of that letter, the group will share in a time of worship. As the leader, you may create your own worship experience based on your tradition and the resources you have available or you can photocopy the suggested Order of Worship located at the end of this session, which can be modified as you see best. The only component that is not included in the Order of Worship is singing, which will depend completely upon the group's resources. If there is a musician in your group, you may want to sing a few hymns or choruses together. If you do not have a musician in your group, you could either listen to a recorded worship song or read the lyrics to a hymn or song.

The suggested Order of Worship includes communion/Eucharist/the Lord's Supper. If you are part of a community that receives communion, Eucharist or the Lord's Supper, you can share it in whatever form is most familiar to your group. In many denominations it can only be consecrated by a clergy member. If you are a member of such a denomination and are not ordained, you will need to work out those details with your pastor. The "Great Thanksgiving" in the Order of Worship is one suggestion for preparing to receive communion.

Following the time of worship you can end with the "Go in Peace" quote and discussion of what is needed to prepare for next week's class.

### GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Have a volunteer read the following quote aloud as a benediction for your time together:

Christianity is not a religion but the formation of a people through the gospel—the good news that God in Christ has reconciled the world. Religion is the human search for God; Christianity is God's search for humans. We do not worship so much as we respond. "Through Christ in the Spirit we respond to the Father's love. This is the ground-pattern of Christian worship" (p. 173).

## FOR THE COMING WEEK

The final section of the book gives guidance for creating a soul-shaping plan. The next session will give the group a chance to reflect on their soul-shaping plan and possibly create a soul-shaping plan for the entire group.

Finally, recruit a volunteer who will bring a Scripture, prayer, poem or song for the next class as a lead-in to the opening silence.