

SURRENDERING Your Life to Honor God: 6 Small Group Sessions on Worship

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LIVING WORSHIP

Before joining the youth ministry staff at Saddleback Church, my wife Cathy and I visited one of the worship services. I didn't know a lot about the church, but I did know it had a great reputation and was known by pastors all over the world. With this in the back of my mind, I found it comical when I looked through the worship bulletin and found spelling errors. I smugly laughed to myself and was eager to share my discovery with Cathy.

As I nudged her I immediately realized she wouldn't be interested. I could tell by the look in her eyes. She had entered into the worship experience and had already shifted her focus from the rush of getting to church on time to the presence of God. Within minutes of our arrival, she had left the world behind. She was worshipping with passion and thankfulness as I had seen her do thousands of times before.

I, on the other hand, was focusing on the human efforts that went into the bulletin. I had missed the point of being at church, and I was missing out on a great opportunity to worship God.

Cathy was a worshiper. I was a spectator.

When people are asked about worship, many people mention their favorite church songs. Unfortunately in many churches singing and worship are considered the same. But worship is so much more than singing. That's only one component of worship. At its core, worship is surrendering your entire life to God, to his way and his control.

My prayer is that these six sessions will lead you to a more intimate relationship with God. Consider making that your prayer too. You'll never be the same again. Neither will the others in your small group.



FELLOWSHIP: CONNECTING Your Heart to Others'

[goal: to have students share about their lives and listen attentively to others]

To worship we need to take our eyes off ourselves so we can focus on God. When we go too long without worshipping God, the overwhelming details of life begin to weigh us down and ultimately to trap us. That's when we begin to believe we're too busy or too tired to focus on God. So slow down! You don't have to rush through these questions. Use them as a guide to trigger conversation with friends who you want to know better. Relax. Talk. Enjoy.

Brainstorm a list of ways to worship God. Write your ideas down. (If you're stuck, look at page 30 for ideas.)

1

Write a definition of worship below and then share your definition with the group. (Don't worry about getting it perfect. You'll have a chance to revise it after you've finished this book.)

2

If you haven't discussed the **Small Group Covenant** on page 88, take time to read it together and discuss it now. Make commitments to one another that your group time will reflect those values. You may want to have one person read the covenant to the group before you begin each lesson as a reminder.

3

Use the **Small Group Roster** (page 90) to record the names and contact information of the small group members.



DISCIPLESHIP: GROWING to Be Like Jesus

[goal: to explore God's Word, learn biblical knowledge, and make personal applications]

Christians talk a lot about worship, yet somehow misconceptions continue. A lot of the discussions are about the particular styles people prefer. For example, some might talk about their love for contemporary music while others think hymns lead to “real worship.” Others prefer silence followed by loud praise songs. Everyone has a preference or two. That’s one of the great things about how God has created humanity—we’re all different!

But the words to a song, the style of the music, and the environment where Christians gather aren’t as important as the heart of the worshiper. The apostle Paul describes worship like this:



¹Therefore, 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. ²Do not conform any longer 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.

³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

—Romans 12:1-3

Terms that look like this are described in Learn a Little More near the end of the session.

What personal mercies have you experienced from God? Get specific.



What does it mean to offer your body
as a spiritual act of worship?

5

What's the relationship between mental transformation ("be transformed by the renewing of your mind") and worship?

6

What are some signs that you're being
transformed by the renewing of your mind?

7

Worshiping God leads to renewal, which leads to
transformation. According to this passage, what
follows transformation?

8

Would you consider yourself to be a discerning
person (meaning that you regularly know the will
of God)? Explain why you think so.

9



10 How do thoughts about yourself impact your thinking about God?

How would you describe the last week or two of your life if you were to look at it through a lens of “sober judgment?”

We don't worship God on our own initiative. Worship of God is in response to something. What are we responding to? What specific clues do you find in the text to support your answer?

13 How can a better understanding of God's mercy improve your worship of him?

14 What's the connection between the worship of the heart and the worship that happens within a church building?



MINISTRY: SERVING Others in Love

[goal: to recognize and take opportunities to serve others]

Although you receive spiritual benefit when you worship God, worship is not about you. Worship is about God and honoring him. When you serve others with a right heart, you're also worshipping God with your life.

Below are four actions that will affect your attitude when you serve others. These same actions are also evident when you take time to focus on God and worship him. Next to each attitude evaluate yourself in your worship and in your service. Write a plus (+) if this attitude is a strength of yours and a minus (-) if you need to improve.

15

Actions	When I worship	When I serve
Appreciation (thankfulness)		
Affirmation (praise, statements of worth)		
Adoration (declarations of love)		
Awareness (a focus on God and his activities)		

16

Share a few of your answers (perhaps your strongest and weakest areas) and explain why you graded yourself the way you did.



EVANGELISM: **SHARING** Your Story and God's Story

[goal: to consider how the truths from this lesson might be applied to relationships with unbelievers]

Do you think the following sentence is true or false?

Unbelievers can't worship God since worship flows from a relationship with him. Unbelievers can be ministered to by observing authentic worship in the life of a believer.

- Explain your response. What do you like about this statement? What don't you like?

17

At the beginning of small groups such as this one, you should decide whether your group is open to inviting friends to join. If your group is open, list who you would like to invite and make plans for talking with them. Your small group leader or your leadership team may have already determined the group is closed at this time. If so, a good group respects and follows that decision. You may be able to invite friends to join you in the next LIFE TOGETHER book.

Read How to Keep Your Small Group from Becoming a Clique (page 92) when you're at home.



WORSHIP: **SURRENDERING** Your Life to Honor God

[goal: to focus on God's presence]

Just like breathing, worship can happen naturally in your life. The life-altering difference between breathing and worship is that we don't have to remind ourselves to breathe. It happens naturally. Worship isn't as natural as breathing, so we can find ourselves spiritually suffocating if we're not taking regular opportunities to focus on God.

Worship can be a spiritual form of breathing. At the end of every small group time, you'll be asked to take some spiritual breaths by focusing on God. As you continue to meet together, this will become easier and more natural.

End your group time by sharing one goal you have for yourself spiritually. (Choose a goal you can pursue through all six sessions). What do you hope to gain by going through a Bible study on worship?

18

19

Share one specific way the others in the group can pray for you. Write down the prayer requests. (See the **Prayer Request Log** on page 132.)

20

Pray together as a small group and commit to ending all your small group times with worship.

21

Before your group breaks, read **At Home This Week** together. (If everyone in the group has already done this in another LIFE TOGETHER book, you can skip the introduction if you'd like.)

You'll find three prayer resources in the back of the book. By reading and discussing them, you'll find your group prayer time more rewarding.

- **Praying in Your Small Group** (page 126). Read this article on your own before the next session.
- **Prayer Request Guidelines** (page 128). Read and discuss these guidelines as a group.
- **Prayer Options** (page 130). Refer to this list for ideas to give your prayer time variety.

AT HOME THIS WEEK

Each week, you'll have at least four options to help you grow and learn on your own—which means you'll have more to contribute when you return to the group.

Daily Bible Readings

On page 104 you'll find **Daily Bible Readings**, a chart of Bible passages that correspond with the lessons—five for each week. If you choose this option, read one passage each day. Highlight it in your Bible, reflect on it, journal about it, or repeat it



out loud as a prayer. You're free to interact with the Bible verses any way you want, just be sure to read God's love letter—the Bible. You'll find helpful tips in **How to Study the Bible** (page 105).

Memory Verses

Memorizing Bible verses is an important habit to develop as you learn to grow spiritually on your own. **Memory Verses** (page 108) lists six verses—one per week—for you to memorize if you want to plant God's Word in your heart. Memorizing verses (and making them stick for more than a few minutes) isn't easy, but the benefits are undeniable. You'll have God's Word with you wherever you go.

Journaling

You'll find blank pages for journaling beginning on page 113. At the end of each lesson, you'll find several options and a question or two to get your thoughts going—but you aren't limited to the ideas in this book. Use these pages to reflect, to write a letter to God, to note what you're learning, to compose a prayer, to ask a question, to draw a picture of your praise, to record your thoughts. For more suggestions about journaling, turn to **Journaling: Snapshots of Your Heart** (page 110).

If you'd like to choose journaling this week, respond to these questions:

When have you had a great worship experience?

What made it great?

Wrap It Up

Write out your answers to the session questions your group didn't have time to discuss.

This week share with the others in your group which option seems most appealing to try during the coming week. The variety of preferences is another reminder of how different the people in your group are.

During other weeks, take time to share with the group what you did **At Home This Week**.

LEARN A LITTLE MORE

Living sacrifices

Within the context of Old Testament worship, sacrifices (often animals) were offered to God and put to death. The worshiper surrendered something valuable as the sacrifice. When Jesus died on the cross, he became the perfect sacrifice. Since we don't have a need to offer animal sacrifices to cover our sins, our response is to worship

God in thanksgiving and praise and to offer all that we have left—the sacrifice of our living selves.

The sacrifice that we offer to God is described with three ideas:

- ☐ Living
- ☐ Being Holy (set apart for God)
- ☐ Pleasing God

Spiritual act of worship

Our spiritual act of worship is a part of an interesting progression described in this passage:

- ☐ God's mercy leads to our worship of him.
- ☐ Our worship leads to being renewed by God's presence.
- ☐ Our renewal leads to our minds being transformed.
- ☐ Our mental transformation leads to the ability to know God's will.
- ☐ In this context, we ought to consider ourselves with sober judgment (or as the New Living Translation puts it, be honest in your estimate of yourselves).

Here are a few specific ways to worship:

- ☐ Praying (Psalm 95:6)
- ☐ Hearing the Word (John 17:17; Deuteronomy 31:11)
- ☐ Giving (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)
- ☐ Baptizing (Romans 6:3-4)
- ☐ Meditating and being silent (Habakkuk 2:20)
- ☐ Celebrating the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)
- ☐ Singing (Ephesians 5:19)
- ☐ Celebrating the arts (Exodus 35:30-36:7)

Transformed

This word means to be changed from one form to another, often a major change. God wants to change us. He wants us to be like Jesus, not the world. Transformation happens when we allow God's Word and his Spirit to renew our minds and clear our vision so we can walk God's way.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Revelation 15:4

Psalm 2:11

Joshua 24:14-18



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