

Worship is *Participative* // Exercise 1

O LORD, you are faithful.

You are faithful in all your words,
and gracious in all your deeds.

At the start of this new year
we praise you
for your acts of kindness to us
and we seek your loving care.

Thank you for creative teachers,
curious students, and energetic staff.

Thank you for new homes, apartments, and dorm rooms,
new friends and colleagues,
and the prospect of fruitful learning,
meaningful work, and life-giving play.

Thank you for the blessing
of knowing your Son, Jesus Christ,
and for the opportunity
to be instruments of his kingdom.

O LORD, you are faithful.

You uphold all who are falling,
and raise up all who are bowed down.

Give strength to professors
scrambling to pull together lesson plans.
Give courage to students

already anxious about their workload
and doubtful of their academic ability.

Give perseverance to staff implementing programs
and managing the day-to-day operations of the campus.

We pray for comfort for the homesick,
friends for the lonely,
healing for those who are sick or recovering from injury,
and peace and hope for those who grieve.

We are mindful today, O LORD,
of the terrible events of September 11, 2001.

End the violence
that continues to rip apart communities
and families every day around your world.

We pray for your peace
and we seek your healing
to bring restoration and reconciliation
to our nations, cities, homes, and classrooms.

Faithful God,
as we give thanks for your never-ending kindness
and seek your loving care,
we bless you,
and we praise your holy name. (Sept. 11, 2009)

Basic context questions

1. In the second paragraph of this prayer, what kinds of people are named?
2. What living arrangements are mentioned?
3. What activities are referred to?
4. In the third paragraph, how are professors prayed for? How are students prayed for? Staff?
5. In the third paragraph, who else is named?

Worship is *Participative* // Exercise 2

Read: “The Asterisk Doesn’t Work: A Man’s Perspective” in *Worship Words* by Ron Rienstra.

I am committed to using inclusive language for people. I am convinced that it is not a small thing—it’s a big deal. But I didn’t used to think so. When I came to Princeton Theological Seminary as a divinity student in the 1990s, I was accustomed to the widespread practice in academia of using gender-exclusive language for people. But the arguments of those who said that *man* and *men* were exclusive did not persuade me. In my mind, the words had an asterisk after them, telling me to remember that they referred to women too. I didn’t really understand what the fuss was about. Then, I attended a chapel service that changed me—first my heart, and then my mind.

Some courageous chapel leaders one day determined to use nothing but feminine references to people throughout an entire service. They were careful to point out that this was an experiment, and a notice at the top of the worship bulletin let everyone know that we should all hear all the references to *women* and *woman* inclusively—that is, with an unspoken asterisk. I rolled my eyes at the lack of subtlety, and resisted this too-heavy-handed attempt at the educational impulse within the community’s devotional prayer. But I determined to worship just the same. To my great surprise, I could not. Every *woman* and *her* felt like a slap in the face that said, “You’re not welcome here.” When the psalm declared “Blessed is the woman who walks not in the counsel of the wicked . . .” I could not imagine myself as that woman, like a tree planted by the waters. When prayers were offered for “women preparing for ministry,” I did not feel prayed for. Throughout the service I felt completely shut out. I knew in my head that the inclusivising asterisk was there, but it didn’t help any; it was a hurdle I couldn’t leap over. I realized how women have felt all along, whether they make a fuss about it or not. And I decided that when I was a worship leader, I would be willing to pay the price of a little extra linguistic consideration in order to help prevent my sisters in Christ from stumbling over that asterisk the way I did. Nowadays, that extra consideration comes to me second nature, and I’m grateful to have been unpleasantly pulled into an important habit of hospitality.

Basic context questions

1. When Rienstra entered seminary, how did he feel about gender-exclusive language (first paragraph)?
2. What does Rienstra mean when he says that the use of *man* or *men* had an asterisk after them?
3. At Princeton Seminary what experiment did the chapel leaders do?

4. How did Rienstra experience every reference to *woman* and to *her*?
5. How did Rienstra feel when prayers for “women preparing for ministry” were offered?

Reflection questions

1. What does gender-*inclusive* language mean?
2. How is using gender-inclusive language an example of enabling *full* participation?
3. How have you experienced the sole use of *men* or *man* in prayers, songs, and/or scripture readings?
4. How might others experience such language?
5. Reflect together on Philippians 2:1-11. How can using gender-inclusive language in our songs, prayers, and scripture readings be a practical application of this exhortation?
6. Using the NIV, practice inserting “sisters” in addition to “brothers,” “women” in addition to “men,” and “all” or “all people” in place of “all men” in the following passages. (Each person takes a passage to read out loud.)

Hebrews 10:19-22

Titus 2:11

Matthew 5:16
7. What questions do you have about using gender-inclusive language? What experiences have you had?

Worship is *Participative* // Exercise 3

²For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. ³On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. ⁴Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church. . . . ⁵One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. . . .

¹³Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. ¹⁴For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unproductive. ¹⁵What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also. . . .¹⁸I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you; ¹⁹nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. (1 Corinthians 14:2-5, 13-15, 18-19)

1. What is the value of speaking in tongues? (v. 4)
2. What is the value of prophecy (v. 4)?
3. What does Paul want emphasized more in *corporate* worship (for the sake of building people up), the spirit or the mind? (v. 19)
4. What might *conscious* participation of the congregation mean?
5. What are some things we would want worshipers to be conscious of in chapel?
6. What might be some creative and practical ways to help enable conscious participation?
7. Individually, write a short one-sentence introduction to this call to worship that helps people to be conscious of the dialogue between God and us in worship.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.” —Matthew 11:28-29 (NIV)

Worship is *Participative* // Exercise 4

Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name (Psalm 30:4).

Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy (Psalm 47:1).

I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands (Psalm 63:4).

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker (Psalm 95:6).

My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD (Psalm 145:21).

1. What physical expressions of worship are cited in these psalm verses?
2. What might *active* participation of the congregation mean?
3. What other congregational actions might be included in worshiping God?
4. Can you name an action in worship that makes you personally uncomfortable?
5. How might someone else find this action meaningful/worshipful?
6. How do you decide as a worshiper whether or not to participate in an action that may make you uncomfortable?
7. How do you feel as a planner and leader about including actions that may make some people uncomfortable?