

## Spiritual Leadership

What does it mean to be a spiritual leader? What about being a member of a Spiritual Leadership Team? What is involved in being part of such a team and what are the expectations? Spiritual Leadership team members are expected to demonstrate a level of maturity in their faith.

- Members should show a desire to learn and grow in their faith.
- Members should be willing and eager to learn more about worship and what it means to be a spiritual leader among their peers.
- Members are expected to support and encourage one another in prayer and to uphold the youth group or school in prayer.
- Members should be willing to engage in personal devotions as well as group devotions, reading and studying the Bible together.

Learning to plan and lead worship requires an understanding of worship. As a team, members will examine the different components of worship and how these components apply to our time of worship as a youth group or school.

Together we begin a journey—a journey of learning and growing in our understanding of worship, our understanding of our role as spiritual leaders, and our understanding of how God is working in each of our lives.

Questions to consider:

1. What is worship? How would you define it?
2. What does it mean to be a leader?
3. What does it mean to be a spiritual leader?

Think about this: Worship is going on all the time in heaven, and when we worship we are joining that which is already happening. (Plantinga, Cornelius Jr, and Sue Rozeboom. *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide To Thinking About Christian Worship Today*. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003: 1)

## What is Worship?

(*The Air I Breathe* by Louis Giglio – excerpts from chapter 1)

You are a worshiper! Every day, all day long, everywhere you go, you worship. It's what you do. It's who you are. We are all worshipers, created to bring pleasure and glory to God who made us. It's what you were made to do.

Should you for some reason choose not to give God what he desires, you'll still worship something—exchanging the Creator for something he has created. Think of it this way—worship is simply about value. The simplest definition one can give is this: worship is our response to what we value the most.

That's why worship is that thing we all do. It's what we are all about on any given day. Because worship is about saying, "This person, this thing, this experience (this whatever) is what matters the most to me. It's the thing I put first in my life. That thing might be a relationship, friends, status, stuff, a name, or some kind of pleasure. Whatever name you put on it, this thing or person is what you've concluded in your heart is worth most to you. And whatever is worth most to you is what you worship.

Worship tells us what we value most. As a result, worship determines our actions, becoming the driving force for all we do. So how do you know where and what you worship? It's easy. You simply follow the trail of your time, your affection, your energy, your money, and your loyalty. At the end of that trail you will find a throne; and whatever, or whomever, is on that throne is what's of highest value to you—and that is what you worship! (Giglio, Louis. *The Air I Breathe: Worship As A Way Of Life*. Multnomah Books, 2003: chapter 1 excerpts)

In the end, worship is more about what we do than about what we say.

Questions to consider:

1. Everybody worships something! Is this a new or different idea when you think about worship?
2. In what ways is our culture in direct opposition to worshipping God?
3. What things in life do you most value?
4. Why should worship matter to us?

## **Three Meanings of Worship**

(from *Discipleship Year 2—Worship* by Ron Rienstra)

The word “worship” can mean different things to different people. Here are three explanations of the word “worship.”

**1. Worship as all of life.**

As Christians we give all of our lives to God, no matter how ordinary our lives seem. Worship isn’t only something we do for an hour on the weekend. Our work, our play, all our common tasks—we seek to do them faithfully in gratitude for the grace we’re given in Jesus Christ. This is how we offer our bodies as sacrifices; this is our spiritual worship.

**2. Worship as the “service of worship.”**

This refers to the corporate gathering—in church or in chapel. Used in this way, worship refers to the sacred time we set aside to gather with other people of God. We sing, listen, speak, pray, and play instruments. We praise, adore, testify, confess, and receive blessing.

**3. Worship as the intimate experience of the divine.**

This is when we experience a deep sense of the power and presence of God. This could take place in a corporate worship setting or in any other situation—perhaps while hiking in the mountains, seeing a beautiful sunset, talking with a friend, or praying in a quiet place.

All of these conceptions of worship are deeply interconnected. At its best, corporate worship makes space for deep connections with God to happen. And even if we don’t always “feel” close to God in our corporate worship, he is still present.

The aim of good corporate worship is to connect all three definitions of worship in a profound and God-glorifying way.

Questions to consider:

1. Think about a time when you had a strong experience of intimate worship. This could have been in a corporate setting or in your everyday activities. What drew you into a close experience with God?
2. When we meet together in worship—whether in chapel or a youth group—what keeps you from experiencing an intimate time of worship with God?
3. In chapel or youth group worship, what best leads you to fully experience God?

## Created To Worship

God created each of us in his image for his honor and glory. Listen to the words of Genesis 1:26-27.

“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (NIV)

Why did God create mankind? He had just finished making a perfect world. There was nothing to mar that perfection. God created beautiful skies and seas, mountains and valleys, and all kinds of creatures. God had a perfect creation! Why bring people into such a perfect world when God knew what was going to happen?

But God did create mankind, creatures made in his image. And God created men and women to worship Him. Look at the call to Abraham. (Read Genesis 12:1-9)

Questions to consider:

1. Why did God call Abraham to a new land and a new life? (Genesis 12:1-3)
2. How did Abraham respond to God’s call? (Genesis 12:4-9)
3. In our worship, God calls us and we respond. God speaks and we listen. We talk to God and we talk to each other. This is evident in our worship. Think about the different aspects of worship listed below. How does each aspect of worship show our conversation with God?

Call to worship

Songs of praise

Confession

Assurance of God’s forgiveness

The spoken Word

Response to God’s Word

God’s blessing

4. Worship is a time where the family of God comes together to communicate with God and each other. Worship, in a sense, is a time of family devotions. What other things do families do when they worship together?

## What Is Worship Like?

What is worship like? What can we compare worship to? What other experiences are similar to worship? These words were written by Paul Ryan, Associate Chaplain for Worship at Calvin College, in June of 2006.

*"I remember my heart beating fast at the opening chords. My eyes were blinded by the video behind the band. Every note rang in my ears. I was experiencing Coldplay (an English alternative rock band) live in Cleveland! Chris Martin, the band's leader, was at his charismatic best gliding his fingers across the keyboard. He danced around the stage with microphone in hand. He inspired us to sing at the top of our lungs. Between me and the band was a sea of fans. We were jumping, lifting our hands high in the air, and shouting every word with passion and devotion. The thought occurred to me, 'This is just like worship.'*

*And it was . . . the wholehearted participation in clapping, shouting, and dancing. We were engaged in a full-bodied multi-sensory experience. Our hearts were joined in a kind-of reverence, awe, and devotion. And Chris Martin, as a quasi worship leader, inspired us to join our voices to electrifying anthems.*

*But then, it wasn't like worship. Our thrill was inspired by catchy tunes and unforgettable musical hooks, not the indescribable God. Our devotion was to four British boys, not to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The anthems spoke of love and loss, but no mention of Christ and his church. It was just like worship . . . but not."*

Paul Ryan goes on to talk about the events in our lives that are similar to worship. It could be a couple's date which signifies a relationship of love and trust. In a way, *"worship is between God and a community of his people, a sort-of inclusive group-date."*

Ryan also states that worship is similar to a theatrical performance in which we are actors performing for God, not for people. We also need to remember that the Holy Spirit is present in our worship.

Ryan says that we can look at worship as a type of pep rally. Ryan writes, *"In worship, we boast of God's greatness and pledge loyalty and devotion to God."*

Questions to consider:

1. In what way is worship like a concert, a date, or a pep rally?
2. What other life events are similar to worship?

## **Biblical Worship**

Often we think of biblical worship as the time spent reading the Bible and hearing a sermon on the Bible passage. Although reading the Bible is a very important part of worship, biblical worship is so much more.

The Bible tells the story of salvation. When we celebrate Advent, the Birth of Christ, Lent, or Easter, we are following biblical patterns. When we sing, we can use language that is biblical. Our songs use images and stories that are laid out in the Bible. The Psalms are rich with language that outlines confession or lament, and praise. The Bible also demonstrates assurance of God's forgiveness and love. And finally, the Bible gives us a clear picture of God's plan for salvation through the birth, death, and resurrection of His son, Jesus Christ.

Activity and questions to consider:

Worship is based on the truth of the Bible and directed to God. Consider the different aspects of worship:

- Call to worship
- Confession
- Assurance of God's forgiveness
- The spoken Word
- Response to God's Word
- God's blessing

Find Bible verses that are used for praise, confession, assurance, hearing God's Word, responding to the Word, and receiving God's blessing. How can these verses be used in worship?

Challenges:

Write a statement of praise using a Bible verse.

Write a prayer of confession using a Bible verse.

Write an assurance of forgiveness using a Bible verse.

Write a statement of God's blessing using a Bible verse.

Do you see and hear scripture being used in your church worship for praise, confession, assurance, and God's blessings?

## The Language of Worship

When we worship, communication is key. We communicate with God, God communicates with us, and we communicate with fellow believers.

We also use language that is basic to our human nature. We learn to say “please” and “thank you” from a very young age. We also know the importance of being able to say “I’m sorry” in our relationships with each other.

The language we use in worship is very similar to the words we use each day with those people in our lives with whom we have relationships.

Questions to consider:

1. In what way is our relationship with God similar to the relationships we have with our parents, siblings, teachers, or friends?
2. How are our relationships with others different than our relationship with God?
3. Look at the list of phrases below. How does each phrase fit into worship?
  1. I love you
  2. I’m sorry
  3. Thank you
  4. Bless you
  5. I’m listening
  6. Help me
  7. Why?
  8. What can I do?
4. Why is it important to have all the above phrases be a part of our worship?
5. How can we emphasize all the phrases above in our youth group or school worship?

## Excellence in Worship

“There is no worship, no music, no prayer, no sermon, in itself so good that God has to accept it. Just as we are sinners whose life God redeems by grace, we are all mumbling stutterers whose words and music God accepts by grace. Just as we cannot attain heaven by a ladder of good works, so we cannot attain God’s ear by a scale of beautiful notes.

In worship, we not only celebrate God’s graceful acceptance of ourselves, we also offer unacceptable gifts, trusting that the same grace that has accepted us will accept them.” (Giglio, Louie. *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide To Thinking About Christian Worship Today*, 2003: 2.)

Our best worship will never be “good enough” for God. That’s a sobering thought. Yet, God calls us to worship himself. He created us for worship. By his grace he accepts our worship. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are drawn into the presence of an almighty God who desires our hearts and our worship.

Even though worship in a corporate church setting may be different than worship in a youth group or a Christian school setting, we need to remember that we are worshiping a faithful and loving God who desires our best. God will take our efforts and create something beautiful.

Questions to consider:

1. What are some similarities between corporate worship that happens in church and worship that happens in a youth group or in chapel?
2. What are some differences between the church worship service and youth group or chapel worship?
3. How does this understanding help us in our preparation of meaningful worship in our youth group or school?
4. If nothing we do in worship is “good enough” for God, why put so much emphasis on excellence in worship?

## Worship Is . . .

The following list was taken from the worship apprentice program at Calvin College. The list outlines seven definitions that complete the phrase: “worship is...”

**Covenantal**—our worship is a conversation between God and us in which we renew the covenant of grace.

**Participative**—worship leaders are not performing for people, but enabling and encouraging the full, conscious, active participation of the congregation (not “audience”) as they worship God.

**Holistic**—we bring all our selves to worship; body and soul, brain and heart, doubt and belief, lament and joy.

**Expansive**— we make creative use of words, music, and more—from many times, places, peoples, and cultures to enlarge our vision of God’s kingdom and situate ourselves properly within it.

**Reverent**—even when playful, our worship acknowledges that it is God with whom we deal when we gather together.

**Spirit-Directed**—we are led by the Holy Spirit in form and in freedom, both in prayer-filled planning and in the surprising moments of worship.

**Expectant**—the Spirit blows where it will, so we will worship with our sails raised, expecting great things of God, and enjoying, rather than engineering, a contagious spiritual energy.

Questions to consider:

1. Looking at the list of worship expectations above, is there any word or phrase that you have not previously considered when thinking about worship?
2. Is there a difference between a worship leader and a lead worshiper?
3. What are your expectations in worship? What are the elements that contribute to a “good” worship experience?
4. What keeps you or others from experiencing God in worship?
5. Does the list of items above change your perception of worship at all?