

Q & A Discussion: Randall Neighbour
What are some ways to start worshiping as a small group?
Randall Neighbour responds in our Q & A discussion.

Worship comes in many forms and should never be limited to singing familiar praise songs while someone plays the guitar. Of course, music and singing are part of worship—I love singing worshipful, slow songs in small group, and if you don't do this you should invite someone from your worship team or another musician to lead your group into Christ's presence.

Speaking of Christ's presence, this is why we worship when we gather as a small group. The goal for every small-group meeting should be to experience Christ's presence, power, and purposes for the lives of the group members. He is the everlasting God, dwelling in the hearts of men. His soul has bonded with the believer's soul in a miraculous way. God should be praised regularly for doing this through singing, sharing about how good it feels to have one's soul bonded to God's soul, reading the Word of God aloud (the Psalms are a great place to begin), or sharing a praise report of God's goodness from the days between the meetings. God is always answering prayer, and we should even testify to our small group when we heard a clear "no!" from God about something we wanted, thought we needed, or asked Him to provide.

Here's an idea for you. If you're struggling to raise the level of worship in your group, talk about it during your meetings! Ask everyone in the group to call friends, talk to others in different groups, search Smallgroups.com, and look outside the normal places for ways to enter into Christ's presence in future meetings. You will find that if you clearly explain the urgency to connect with Christ in your midst so that you can experience his power and purposes for your lives, you'll find group members willing to join you in your pursuit of it.

Finally, I want to encourage your group to pray far more during your meetings than you do now. A few months back, I facilitated an hour of prayer in my small group that was transformational for us! Although our church is not "Pentecostal" by any stretch of the imagination, we all prayed aloud simultaneously like so many churches do around the world. This way, every person in the room had the opportunity to pray for a solid hour, enjoy the audible fervor of others, and not be forced to listen to one person hog all the prayer time. If you want to know what we prayed about for the hour, we broke it down into six ten-minute segments and focused on different areas of need in our lives, our group, our lost friends, our church, our families, and country.

Last week, I visited a small group who does not enter into Christ's presence with some form of worship during their meetings. The conversation was not transformational, no one confessed sin, two people started sending text messages halfway through our time together because they forgot about the "no texting during the meeting rule," and we wrapped up the meeting 15 minutes early. Needless to say, I won't be going back to that group.

Worship is something you simply must press into every time you meet with your small group, even if you don't have a gifted musician in your people mix. When your group gathers with other groups for a weekend service, you experience God on high and more powerful than all things and beings (His transcendence). However, you cannot experience the intimacy of the Christ within (His immanence) ministering through you to others in the room (and vice-versa) unless you enter into his presence through worship. Sorry for the theology lesson, but without it a discussion of the importance of regular small-group worship is a moot point.

—Randall Neighbour is President of TOUCH Outreach Ministries in Houston, TX, and author of The Naked Truth About Small Group Ministry. You can check out his blog, RandallNeighbour.com

Worship in Small Groups

Why it's vital that your group maintain an upward connection with the Almighty

Joel Comiskey | posted 3/19/2008

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"Don't teach about worship as part of the small-group order when you're speaking to our leaders," the pastor told me right before the seminar started. "We don't practice worship in our small groups. It's too much of a hassle to train the leaders to direct worship—and after all, our small groups are primarily for non-Christians."

"Okay," I nodded—outwardly calm. But inwardly I was wrestling with this new revelation.

Jesus First

What surprised me about the small-groups ministry at this church was that its normal, typical small groups excluded worship. I understand that a certain number of groups will have more of a seeker-sensitive approach—but to exclude worship altogether from the bread-and-butter small groups? I felt that this church had cut out one of the major arteries that flows directly to the heart of God.

I strongly believe that small-group ministry is a powerful tool to reach the lost, but is this our only purpose? We're flooded with information about how to be "seeker-sensitive," but have we paid as much attention to being God-sensitive? How does God feel when we pay more attention to the seeker than the Almighty?

The Scriptures help straighten us out.

Jesus says, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only" (Matthew 4:10). Worship first; service second. This order is repeated later on in Matthew when Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Afterwards comes the second command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37–39).

And then we read about the *M* sisters: Martha and Mary. Martha excelled in serving but failed in worship. Mary cared about only one thing—the person of Jesus Christ. Who got the "A" grade? Jesus tells us: "Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Matthew 10:42).

One more example: In the last book of the Bible, Jesus talks about an incredible church that produced good works like a modern-day factory. Yet after highlighting the impeccable deeds of that church's congregation, Jesus rebukes them: "I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp-stand from its place" (Revelation 2:4–5).

How does all this relate to small-group ministry? It tells me that an upward, God-focus must be at the center of every small-group ministry. While techniques to lasso non-Christians are great, they shouldn't be at the core of our ministry. God is the core. Let's be encouraged to make our groups God-sensitive.

The Normal Small Group

In the same way that the human body needs a good diet, most "normal" cell groups include certain staple ingredients. I recommend the following practices for basic cell groups:

- Upward Focus—knowing God through worship and prayer
- Inward Focus—knowing each other through fellowship
- Outward Focus—reaching out to those who don't know Jesus through small-group evangelism

- Forward Focus—raising up new leaders through training and discipleship

No two small groups are exactly alike, but each maintains the ingredients.

Prayer in Small Groups

Prayer is part of that upward focus. In my own cell group, we almost always begin with prayer. Then we enter worship, which is a form of prayer. Notice how prayer and worship are linked in Revelation 5:8–9: "Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."

We also start the lesson with prayer. During the lesson time, God speaks to us through the Word. Invariably there are prayer needs, so we allow a time for prayer requests. Finally, we pray for unsaved loved ones to know Jesus Christ and come to our group.

The sensitive leader utilizes the style of prayer that best fits the context of his or her small group. When non-Christians are present, for example, an all-out, "fiery" prayer meeting is probably not the best. Silent prayer might be in order, or praying in pairs. Group leaders must remain sensitive to the situation and utilize the type of prayer that best fits with the circumstances—but do pray.

Worship in the Cell

Singing and prayer form part of the upward focus in a small group. Entering God's presence through song is an important part of the worship time.

You don't have to play guitar or sing like Amy Grant to lead God-honoring worship. I've experienced worship times in which the members choked out a joyful noise (with the emphasis on the word *noise*). God doesn't require a tabernacle choir. He looks at the motivation for singing. Some groups simply prefer to play a tape or CD, while the members follow along.

The worship leader should pick five to six songs before the worship starts. Or the worship leader might invite group members to select the songs before the worship time and then sing them in sequence. I think it's best to concentrate on God during the entire worship time, rather than stopping and starting to pick the song. I also like to intermingle praise and prayer between songs.

Don't limit the worship time to just singing songs. At a cell-groups seminar, one participant shared, "It's important to go beyond singing songs. Our group has experienced God's presence through reading Psalms together, praying sentence prayers, or even waiting in silence."

Go for It

Make your group God-sensitive, while asking him to show you how to reach non-Christians. Put him first in your group, and he'll give you a new, dynamic atmosphere that will both edify the saints and evangelize the unbelievers.

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