

Worship Ideas

Pre-worship Exercise

One person read this slowly before worship begins with soft music in the background. (I used '18' from Moby-18.)

As you sit here tonight, you are partaking in a story that has been going on for thousands of years. Tonight we have specifically gathered to worship God. People have been gathering for centuries to worship this God. The God of Israel. The Hebrew God, Yahweh.

I want to help you see that your faith in God is mostly not about you. Your part of the Story is a small blip on the radar screen. You have been taught that your relationship with Jesus is a personal one. That is true, but you are not alone. It's not going to be just you and Jesus in heaven. No, your relationship with him extends to all of the people of God. And the people of God have been around for a very long time.

I want you to place your feet on the floor. Imagine for a second that your feet are actually the base of a tree trunk with roots extending down into the ground. Imagine those roots taking you down and back into the history of God's people. Rifling back past your life, past the modern era with its big churches and big ministries. Back past the Methodist revival of the 19th century. Back past Martin Luther, John Calvin and the Protestant Reformation. Back past the overwhelming Catholic empire. Past the early church, Paul, Barnabas, Peter, John. Through the turbulent Judaism of Jesus' day. Go past the time in exile, the destruction of the temple, the prophets, the sins of the fathers. Pass the man after God's own heart, David. The conquest of the land, the wandering in the wilderness, the giving of the law, the crossing of the red sea. Moses, Joseph, Jacob, Issac, Father Abraham. God's promise and covenant to form a people for himself. Go past Noah and the ark. Even poor Jabez, pass by his little prayer. Keep going all the way, before Adam and Eve. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." Emptiness. Nothing but God's Spirit brooding over what he was about to conceive. What he was going to will into existence.

First there was light.

Then stars, planets, the laws to govern everything.

Nature, plants, trees, animals.

Man, woman, relationship.

Then man's deception, sin, banishment.

And God begins the process of creating a people for himself out of which will come salvation, redemption, freedom, and life. You are a part of that people. So was Samuel. So was Jesus. You have been adopted into a family. All families have stories. They connect us with heroes, saints, and sinners. All of them having the same Spirit. Worshipping the same God. And that is who we worship tonight.

Deep Dive Experiment/ Feasting on God's Word

Instructions: Begin with 5 minutes of silence, preparing your hearts and minds to receive God's word.

Then, read together the first prayer slowly and spend some time silently meditating on the first scripture.

Do this with each prayer and scripture taking as much time as it seems right. Finally, allow time at the end to write about the experience and then share it with each other.

Pray together: Father, We pray that you meet us here. We are friends gathered together sharing this journey in your kingdom. We are pursuing you just as you pursue us. Tonight we want to be clay in your hands. Mold us and shape us. We want you to intersect our lives and make changes. Infuse us with your presence. Continue to lead us on your path of Christ likeness.

"Be still, and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10

Pray together: Jesus – Lead us into your depths. Teach us about your kingdom. Give us a longing to be with you and derive our entire lives from you. We long for you to teach us how to truly live. Take us deeper into you.

As the deer pants for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. Psalm 42: 1

Pray together: Holy Spirit – make these living words real to us. Unlock deeper levels of understanding. Write them across our hearts and give us the wisdom to live in them. Help us to truly understand that apart from you we can accomplish nothing. Not one thing in our own discipleship or for the advancement of your great kingdom. Reveal more of yourself to us through ordinary, everyday things. Make the story of your kingdom alive to us.

I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5

Amen

The Journey of Prayer

Asking the question, "Lord, Will You Teach us to Pray."

- "Your view of prayer is too small."
- Moving from information about prayer to training / experimentation in prayer
- Learn from the masters (do what they do, did)
- Eugene Peterson "Working the Angles"

o Prayers (our words to God) are never the first words in the conversation – they are always secondary. God gets the first word.

o “Prayer is not something we think up to get God’s attention or enlist his favor. Prayer is answering speech. The first word is God’s word. Prayer is a human word and is never the first word, never the primary word, never the initiating and shaping word simply because we are never first, never primary.” – page 48

- Question – What if God is not saying anything? Is God really silent?

o “God’s word is the creative means by which everything comes into existence. The word of God constitutes the total reality in which we find ourselves.”

o Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 27 – “And God said...”

o Creation, covenant, salvation – all spoken into being by God.

o “This massive, overwhelming previous-ness of God’s speech to our prayers, however obvious it is in Scripture, is not immediately obvious to us simply because we are so much more aware of ourselves than we are of God. We are far more self-conscious than God-conscious and so when we pray [we think] we are getting in the first word with God.”

- Question - So how do we answer?

o We need an appropriate language, one that is soaked in the creativity, history, and integrity of the biblical story.

o As we talked about last time, the Psalms are our starting place.

- The Psalms...

o Usually come across looking like a jumbled, unorganized collection of songs / prayers that often seem irrelevant and repetitive.

o But, why have Jews and Christians consistently turned to the Psalms to guide them in the life of prayer?

o “The Psalms were the prayer book of Israel; they were the prayer book of Jesus; they are the prayer book of the church. At no time in the Hebrew and Christian centuries (with the possible exception of our own 20th century) have the Psalms not been at the very center of all concern and practice in prayer.”

- Before we look at how to use them...

o The Psalms do have a structure

§ 150 Psalms arranged in 5 books

§ 41:13, 72:18-20, 89:52, 106:48, 150

o Why are “5 books” significant – to contrast the 5 books of the Torah, to answer God’s word.

- Final thoughts...

o “We need a vocabulary...that is sufficiently personal and adequately wide-ranging to answer everything that God says from wherever we happen to hear it within every developing stage of our pilgrimage across the entire spectrum of our lives.”

o Our own language is acceptable, even necessary, but insufficient.

o St. Ambrose called the Psalms “a sort of gymnasium for the use of all souls, a sort of stadium of virtue, where different sorts of exercise are set out before him, from which he can choose the best suited to train him to win his crown.”

Exercise:

Psalm 25 or Psalm 33 – Choose one and proceed through this exercise for about 15-20 minutes.

Read the Psalm twice, quietly and slowly going over the words and phrases, feeling the rhythm and sensing the context. Allow one or two verses, phrases, or even words ‘stick’ in your mind. Take those segments and churn them over and over – meditating on their meaning and staying open for God to speak to you. Respond in whatever way you think is appropriate. After the time has ended, describe anything you felt was significant to the group