



Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

10

Youth Ministry
Discipleship - Worship

Youth Ministry Training
Lesson Ten: Youth Ministry Discipleship—Worship

Lesson Introduction

Session Overview

- An Exercise in Belonging
- Worship as a Response to Our Culture
- Practicing Worship
- Worship-Centered Teaching

Learner Objectives

At the end of this session you should:

- Articulate a holistic definition of worship
- Weave this definition of worship through her or his ministry to, with, and among young people
- Understand the various movements in worship
- Teach based on worship-centered principles

Introduction

This session explores the nature of worship as a Christian discipline. Not only is this discipline a necessary part of a healthy Christian life, but it is also an essential part of a healthy ministry to young people.

Lesson Body

An Exercise in Belonging

I'd like to learn something about the places you grew up. I have a few questions about your home village, town, city or country. Are there any festivals, celebrations, customs or traditions that are unique to your area—so unique, in fact that I may never have heard of them? Let's look at another question. Are there any words or phrases that are unique to the people who live in your area? In other words, is there a language all your own, a unique set of words or phrases that someone outside your area would never know? Language is another way we can know we belong to a place and a people. Here's another one. Is there any chapter in your town's history, your part of the country that helps to define you as a group of people? Are there names, places or dates or stories in your collective memory that are important to you, but that may have gone unnoticed or unappreciated everywhere else? These stories and events, either as tragedies or celebrations, demonstrate that you belong.

Can you see what is starting to take shape? We have talked about the traditions, the unique languages and the particular, local histories. These are powerful ways in which you and your community belong together. This is all part of your shared history, your collective memory.

Now think about the church. Are there traditions and customs that we intuitively know about? We don't have to explain these customs to each other, we just know. How about Communion? What about a Good Friday service, a Maundy Thursday service, or anointing with oil? Some of the things we do in the regular rhythm of being the Church make no sense at all to those people looking in from the outside. But we know and understand, because we already belong, we are part of the history.

Are there words and phrases that we use on a regular basis? What about the phrases, "I'm saved," "washed in the blood," "the blood of the Lamb," or "born again"? What about the word, "grace"? Do we have a shared history? Do those of us who are members of this global Kingdom known as the Church have any events in our shared past that bind us together? Yes, we do! What are some events in our recent history that are reasons in and of themselves that we belong together? Keep pushing it back, back now into the pages of the Bible.

The Bible is an incredible collection of shared history and collective memory of God's presence and interaction with His creation—especially humankind. The Bible and all its stories is our story—our belonging to someone bigger than ourselves. Do our people know the story as well as the church history of those who chose to follow Jesus throughout in the face of many different challenges? Do we know our own Story well enough to tell it? So often the people around us, the people not yet aware of our story have questions about life, about the nature of our God, about Jesus. Sadly, just as often, the people of God don't seem willing or able to respond.

You are working with a generation of young people who don't mind that you have an organization that has standards or a statement of belief. They want to belong to a group that gives them an identity. What is that identity? We are the people of God.

Worship as a Response to Our Culture

The truth of the matter is this—this era, with all of its good and bad, is a perfect time for the Church to be the Church! As it has been for each generation, it is our time for us to reintroduce ourselves to the planet as the people of God, a people of worship!

WORSHIP! The word invokes images of worship-style preferences. Fixation on our personal preferences will derail the Church's efforts to change our world. In order to make our mark in society, the Church must recapture worship's thorough, practical and holistic meaning. We are in danger of missing the point. I believe that the church's place in society is at risk. Churches aren't very often the major, society-shaping forces that they used to be. We are frighteningly close to being a non-issue, and again, our ability to influence and flavor the culture around us may be dependent on our ability to recapture a healthy, holistic and biblical definition of the word "worship".

How does the Bible itself describe or define worship? There are several Hebrew and Greek words translated as worship. In the New Testament alone there are four significant words translated as worship. Sometimes, we don't have all the words we need to communicate a Biblical concept. We miss out on the true meanings the original authors intended or the history around it.

Take for example, one of our most treasured and often-quoted verses in all of Scripture, Romans 12:1: “Therefore, 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.” Look at the first word, “Therefore.” It’s obvious that this word is referring back to something said or written earlier. What is it referring to? This statement refers back to Romans 9, 10 and 11, where Paul walks through God’s stormy relationship with His chosen people, Israel. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca and all who would follow. Paul mentions Jacob, Esau and then Moses. God’s love and devotion to His people is the common thread that runs through this entire story despite Israel’s best efforts to rebel and frustrate the God of the promise, the God of the covenant.

Paul writes of a God who refuses to give up on His people. Nowhere else is God the “God of the second chance” like He is with the people of Israel. Finally, God redraws the boundaries of His kingdom in such a way as to include all who would call on the name of the Lord, both Jews and Gentiles. And still, God demonstrates the eternal love He has for Israel. “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people” (Rom 10:21). In chapter 11, Paul, a self-proclaimed Jew among Jews, still hopes, prays, and yearns for the redemption of his people. Paul, awash in this amazement, says finally in Romans 12:1: “Therefore, I urge you . . .”

True worship arises because God has called and continues to call His people, the Church. As an echo, the Church’s worship directed to God is a response to His gifts. Crucial to worship then, is the Church’s ability to remember and recognize God’s gifts throughout history. But those stories are not just God’s stories. They are the stories of the Church as well—they are OUR stories. Not until we as members of the Church rediscover our story, the story of the dynamic relationship between God and His people, can we properly respond to God and His gifts; without our story, we cannot be living sacrifices; without our story, we cannot worship.

Can we be honest? Much of what is now called worship, isn’t. Worship cannot be self-centered. God is not the ultimate vending machine. While God the eternal Father does seek to comfort His children, He is still God and still worthy of worship even if our “needs” aren’t met. What seems to be moving Paul to tears in Romans 12 is not so much what God has done for Paul, but what God has done for mankind as can be discovered in God’s salvation history as recorded in the pages of the Bible. Each of us has some idea of God’s graciousness to us, but our perspective is hopelessly and helplessly limited.

Youth workers have to teach our story; tell and retell our story, or else young people will not truly know Him. If you don’t tell the story, they won’t know how to be people of worship; they won’t know how to respond! Worship is about the story. It’s about understanding and responding to all that God has done throughout the chapters of our history.

Worship is not a Religious Exercise, it is a Relationship

Note Paul's emphasis on "living" sacrifices as opposed to the "dead" sacrifices of the Old Testament. For it is not just in the dying, but living in relationship with Him, that we become acceptable sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. We continually give our lives to God. We no longer decide our future. Instead, we rely totally on God to lead us and guide us. We give God the totality of our lives. How can we give our all, not knowing what the future holds? The answer lies in the relationship. In what has been since the beginning of time a dynamic and living "relationship," God has sought each of us out, interacting with us, building a heritage, a story that continues to this day. It is a story that continues to be written through our lives as we live in relationship with this God of relationship.

Worship is a Lifestyle

Paul says, "This is your spiritual worship." It is crucial at this point to recognize that the act of giving ourselves over completely as living sacrifices is equated with the Greek word "*latreia*," which includes the idea of service or religious homage. With this definition in mind, Paul writes that believers truly worship when their lives are lived entirely in grateful response to God's nature, to His purpose, and to His good gifts that He gives to His people. Eugene Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases 12:1:

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him.

The implications are clear: reclaiming our story enables believers to recapture a way of life that has been dormant since the earliest days of the Church. The proper response to God will necessarily result in a particular, sacrificial way of life. True worship—the recovery and repossession of the story, our story—is a distinctive and peculiar way of life. Look at this snapshot of our ancestors—the earliest Church:

Everyone around was in awe. All those wonders and signs done by the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold everything they owned and pooled their resources, so that each person's need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the temple, followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw and every day their number grew, as God added those who were saved (Acts 2:42-47, *The Message*).

The climate is right, the time is right for a rebirth of an Acts 2 Church. Living life in worship, day in and day out with consistency, we experience the truth of a loving God. Our spiritual hunger is by relationships with God and each other in the Church. We belong since God has invited us to belong to His family. That's worth celebrating.

Practicing Worship

Perhaps the best way to understand the true meaning of worship still rests in practicing it in the middle of a worshipping community. In this sense, the term “practicing” does not mean a rehearsal of what we do, or a strategy to become masters at worship. Instead, the term ‘practicing’ means that we give ourselves over to the structures and forms that guide our worship until we are shaped and conditioned to experience and respond to God with our whole heart. We do not master worship; instead we allow worship to bring us into a posture of obedience where we serve God.

Worship also means attributing worth or respect to God, which often comes in many styles and shapes throughout the world. Worship can be used to describe both personal devotion and community worship, the gathering of people as a Christian assembly. Author James White, in *Introduction to Christian Worship*, notes we usually treat our assembling for worship as merely a mechanical necessity, but coming together in Christ’s name is itself an important part of common worship. These gatherings, however, can be quite diverse. From the early history of the church there have been a number of different “classical” worship traditions. Regardless of the different approaches to the worship of God, one thing remains clear, worship should bring us into the presence of God and also awaken us to God’s love so that we can respond with our whole lives.

In order to “practice” worship we need to keep in mind some key elements that most worship services share, no matter how formal or informal. The elements may look different in various cultural contexts, but they remain crucial for sound worship leadership with young people.

First, worship incorporates a basic sense of “space.” While worship might happen anywhere, often we are called to fashion a space that people find helpful to their worship experience. This space may be a church sanctuary, a classroom, a meeting hall or outdoors. The key challenge is to arrange the space so that the focus is on God. This space might include special altars and furniture, or religious symbols and artwork, or music played and sung. The goal remains to structure this “sacred space” so that young people know they are in a place that signals a sense of reverence and expectation that God will do something.

Second, almost all worship has a sense of timing, rhythm, or flow. Whether an open praise service or a formal, liturgical, worship setting, almost all worship tries to bring people through a series of actions into the presence of God. While small changes might be made, the overall flow remains important, whether a “free church” worship and liturgical worship. Free church worship describes congregations that like to keep a portion of the worship service spontaneous and open. The term liturgical often describes congregations that have a set, often printed, worship structure that they follow in a regular pattern. Regardless of the level of spontaneity and freedom included, some blended worship services try to incorporate both. Historically almost all congregations still follow some basic structure aimed to help people actually enter into worship. The four basic acts, from the beginning to the end of the worship service, that provide a rhythm or flow to worship include the following:

Four Basic Acts that Structure Worship

1. *Entering into God's Presence*: Actions such as singing and praying designed to invite people into God's presence.
2. *Hearing God's Word*: Actions such as hearing scripture read and proclaimed so that we hear Christ's message for us as we rest in God's message.
3. *Responding/Celebrating with Thanksgiving*: God's word invites our response, be it at an altar or through the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Responses can include times of commitment but they also express moments of giving thanks to God for what we have heard and for the chance to be in the presence of God.
4. *Sending*: Finally, worship includes some form of dismissal so that we can be called to love and serve God's world. The final act of gathered worship includes the command to live out our worship throughout the week.

Finally, almost all worship requires dedicated, authentic leadership. Youth workers learn early that the goal of leading worship revolves around getting young people to focus on God, not on the worship leader. Nevertheless, sound, spiritually grounded leadership remains a key concern. One does not have to be unduly outgoing to be a good worship leader. Instead, a good worship leader recognizes that they must focus more on the rhythm of worship than on their personal abilities. Quiet, reflective people may serve as strong leaders as long as these adults--- or young people--- can direct the worshippers' attention toward God.

Regardless of our role in worship we need to remember that the focus must be on God. We can have a beautiful worship setting, great technology, excellent music, powerful preaching and dynamic leadership and still miss the goal of worship. If people do not enter the presence of God and if they are not inspired to then live out worship in their daily lives we have failed to understand the basic purpose and rhythm of worship.

Worship Centered Teaching

Beyond the practice of worship, how do we prepare youth to live a life anchored in the true direction worship calls for? Can we relive the story of God, respond relationally, live fully a worship-centered life? Can our teaching resemble our worship? Can God's story found in the pages of the Bible really influence the way you are doing youth ministry? The Bible has great transformational power. Here's a question: How do you teach the Bible?

Finding Ourselves in the Story

Unfortunately, young people under our care often do not receive the full Story of God, but only those bits-and-pieces that the youth worker feels are important. I did a little bit of checking to see how the ancient Israelites taught their children. Without many of the wonders of technology that more and more of us have at our disposal to transmit Biblical truth, how did the ancient Israelites teach faith to their children? They told stories. They told them in a particular order so as to build their children from the inside out.

Let's talk about the Story of the Bible. Make a timeline—use the back of this page or some other means. Let that timeline represent the storyline in the Bible. Take a few moments to put Creation at the beginning and the Second Coming at the end. Now, answer the following question: If it were your responsibility to tell the Story of God to someone who had never heard it before, what stories would you believe to be the most crucial? We want to completely cover what it means to be the People of God. Go ahead, take a few minutes, and write these on the timeline. Do your best to try to keep the stories in order.

Now your timeline should show a gap between the end of Biblical time and the Second Coming. Do you know what belongs in that space? We do. That is where we live now, you and I, as we minister to our young people. Why is that so important? Your people won't truly belong until they know that they belong on this timeline right here with the likes of Abraham, Moses and Jesus Christ, all members of the family of God. If we'll do this thing right, we can show them how they can be a part of God's story—the story that continues to be written through us by God.

More Active than Passive.

Worship-Centered Teaching is in its essence more active than passive. The traditional lecture style is a passive form of teaching and learning. You know, from painful experience, that the lecture style is not always the best way to get your point across. Psychologist Edgar Dale notes we learn more as our activities get us closer to direct, purposeful, personal experience. So, we learn:

- 5% - 10% Verbal or written
- 25% - Media
- 40% - 60% Role-play
- 80% - 90% Experience

Edgar Dale's work is of monumental importance to us who teach. When we can actually figure out a way for our young people to experience the truth of the lesson in a hands-on way, then they take home eighty to ninety percent of the lesson we're trying to get across. It is not enough to say, "As Christians, you should go and feed the poor." Instead, after you teach that lesson, go and serve. Go and help to feed the poor! I know it sounds simple, but we act as if it is nearly impossible. Sometimes the best thing you can do for your people is to cancel your regularly scheduled activities so that you can give your youth an opportunity to experience the truth of a lesson. You'll be amazed at what you can teach and what your young people can learn.

More We-Oriented, than I-Oriented.

The focus of Worship-Centered Teaching is not on the individual but on the community. It is this kind of emphasis that will tie our students to the traditions of the church and the depth of the scripture. This is the perfect time to say, "Here is a place to belong and here is how we believe." This doesn't mean that we seek to take advantage young peoples' desire to belong, creating youth who appropriate our beliefs but fail to live them out. Rather we can provide a place where students can feel welcomed and accepted. When the students make the choice to enter our groups, we can then stand up and say, "This is who we are and this is how we believe." Worship-Centered Teaching does not apologize for having distinctive beliefs.

Another aspect of being more “we-oriented than I-oriented” is in how we assist our teens with their devotional life by focusing on personal and community practices. We all know that a regular devotional time is essential to the development of faith. Our young people often aren’t equipped to be the final authority on the interpretation of Scripture, and we do them a great disservice when we look at them solely for personal interpretation and individual application. We need to make sure they also encounter scripture in community with people who can serve as sound references and to live the story through accountability and guidance from others. Only as we model Worship-Centered Teaching for our students, and provide opportunities for them to join us, will they come to understand and find their place in God’s Story.

Application

Construct a timeline of Biblical History on a large wall in the place you minister to your young people, and make sure to leave a large space for the pictures that you will take of your students. Place these pictures on the wall, in the timeline of God’s ever-unfolding story.

Attend your local worship service, identify the basic movements that go on in the service designed to bring people closer to God and send them back into the world.

Read Nehemiah 8 and 9. Compare and contrast this passage of scripture with the Romans 9-12 passage that we studied in this lesson.

Review the lessons you have taught over the past years. Have you been telling and retelling the story? Or have you been bouncing from topic to topic? In light of what you have read, what plan do you need to implement to guide your teaching to ensure that you cover the entire story with your students?

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

Are there any festivals, celebrations, customs or traditions that are unique to your area—so unique, in fact that other people may never have heard of them?

What are some events in our recent history that are reasons in and of themselves that we belong together?

How does your understanding of Romans 12:1 impact your leading of worship for youth?

Do you know the Biblical Story well enough to help your students find their place in it?

Does your youth group see themselves as part of the continually unfolding story? Why or why not?

What are some concrete ways that you can begin to change your teaching to reflect a Worship-Centered Teaching approach?



Nazarene Youth International

