

## Group Prayer and Worship

When we gather in small groups, be it 3 or 4, or 12-15, we can hesitate to do more than just offer a few prayers at the beginning or end of our time. I think this is because our model of worship is Sunday morning... with a group of musicians, words on the screen and a sense of a big sound, and often eloquent pray-ers leading prayer times.

One of the keys for meaningful small group worship is to realize that different settings require different approaches. If you explore Scripture you will see people worshipping on their own, both indoors and outdoors; family worship and prayer, often around a meal; household gatherings; and larger community groups. Each size includes similar elements, but with varied approaches.

I believe it is very significant that Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst.” It is as if he is excited that we are together because of him...so he reveals himself. Of course he is always with us, but together there is an added dimension, if only we would recognize it.

Another struggle can be feeling we have to make a ‘mental leap’ from the casual chat and good food into ‘being spiritual’. I constantly find that simply saying, “Why don’t we pray about that?” leads into natural, warm, often very honest and touching prayer together. It can actually be easier and more honest than some Sunday prayer. We are not ‘performing’ or leading, we are being our real selves with our friends and family. And the effect can be very bonding.

So what are the simple keys to meaningful worship and prayer in small groups?

1. Determine to explore and experiment, and if necessary shift the mindsets of those you share closely with until this is the most natural and blessed thing in your everyday lives. Because it was meant to be this way. If there are glitches or failures... press on. Don’t settle for less than his presence and power on a regular basis.
2. Make sure people are comfortable. Sometimes being too cold, or too hot, or too close to others, or too distant; bothered by phones, insects, dogs, cats, escaped birds, .... whatever – can be highly distracting. Some people need ‘atmosphere’ before they can focus on the Lord and pray freely.
3. Recognise the presence of Jesus. ‘Thank you Jesus that you’re here, you know all about this... you are so full of love...’ etc. Describe what the spiritual reality **is**, and your faith will bring his presence to your awareness. This often melts people’s hearts, and opens them up to him. Sometime you could use songs on a CD, or if you have a musician, print off words (or make up a little booklet) and sing together. Make sure they are simple songs that are not a strain for a few people to sing.
4. Make this a ‘family conversation’ with the Father. This is different from more formal Sunday prayer. Its characteristic is that we all contribute parts of the conversation. One person does not speak for the others in long prayers. One may begin adoration or asking, and another will pick it up and add to it, and then another... Lots of short ‘waves’ of words, and ‘Amen’s,’ and ‘Yes Lord...’ Think of lots of small rippling waves on a sea shore.  
I have found that sometimes gentle laughter will happen as people are honest and ‘quirky’ in what they say... there is a sense of ‘enjoying’ the Lord and each other in his presence. It is very precious.
5. Think about being an orchestra. Jesus said that when he was in the midst of his people they would ‘agree’ in prayer. This means ‘harmonising’ together. Think of different instruments, different sounds, different parts – but all doing their part to create a symphony. The Lord is the conductor... and the audience – and we together are the harmony that delights him.

6. Prepare for worship and prayer. Often our focus is on events, people, struggles, joys.... and it helps for the leader or initiator to offer something to focus on. This could be a song on a CD, or one we sing – a scripture we read and ponder on for a few minutes – or simply each one giving thanks for something’. Just asking for prayer out of the blue can often be daunting.

7. Cultivate meaningful silence. There is awkward silence, when no one responds to suggestions to pray or worship, and usually this is because there has been little preparation. Meaningful silence can just ‘happen’ after music, or someone’s prayer. The leader can just let the group savour the moment for a few minutes, and then ask ‘What do you think was happening just then?’ Often out of their answers can come a fresh direction for prayer or worship.

8. Create a restful place. For many, coming to a small group is coming to an oasis, away from the demands of work or a busy household. Talk to them about what ‘refreshes’ them in their time together. It could be a variety of things – quietness, humour, the Scriptures pondered on, the music, prayer, the sense of harmony....even the atmosphere of the home they meet in. When you know what works for them, make sure you include it regularly.

9. If people are frequently hesitant to pray, ask them to pray a written prayer (you could provide these) – or ask them to write a short prayer at the end of your studies, or from a piece of Scripture, and then read it. They could even be encouraged to write a prayer (or a poem) during the week and bring it to share. Using a hymn that is read aloud can be helpful.

10. Ponder on the nature of God. For a season you could think about different aspects of God – his goodness, his majesty etc. Get a couple of your people to bring something (a song, a poem, an object) that speaks of this aspect. This can be inspiring and enlarging. You could begin by making a list together, and asking people to pick one they would like to share something on at a later meeting.

11. Use symbols. Have a discussion about what ‘things’ remind you of Him in your daily life. Bring them if possible to a group time and share.

12. Create a Psalm for worship. Explore the shape of Psalms with their declarations, praise, petitions etc. Then get everyone to write their own Psalm and share it.

OR – create one together, with different people offering the next line. Write it up on a whiteboard or big sheet of paper.

13. Finish the sentence... For worship - the leader can call out the first part, and others bring the other half.

“Lord you are.....”      “Father, thank you for...”      “Lord we really need.....”

“Lord we love you because.....”      “Lord we trust you for.....”

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