

These are great ideas that combine worship and prayer in creative and interesting ways. Perhaps you could have someone do one of these each month as a more elaborate LIFEGROUP worship experience.

IN LIGHT OF THE CROSS

You will need:

A votive candle for each person in your group

A lighter or matches

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Arrange 12-15 votive candles in the form of a cross (you may want to put the candles on squares of paper or a paper plate).
2. Read the excerpt below and ask your group members to pray out loud and then light their candles. If you have a small group, you may want to have some pray more than once (and light another candle) so that the cross will be completely lit when you are finished. You lead by praying a very simple sentence prayer which will give others some assurance that they do not have to pray long prayers. Always allow for those who will not want to pray out loud by telling them that if they feel uncomfortable they may pray silently and then light a candle or two.
3. Allow for silence in between prayers.

READ THIS:

The cross is, by far, the most recognized Christian symbol in the world. On the cross, Jesus Christ finished the ugly business of sin and condemnation. When once man wondered what he could do or give that would put him in right standing with God, now he can simply stand in the shadow of the cross. From the cross His grace, that unmerited favor, shines on us who choose to believe. Our shackles are broken and our hearts restored.

Without the Lamb, the perfect sacrifice, nailed to the cross, we would not be here today, and so we give thanks.

Look at the cross for a moment. The upright piece of the cross points to the sky. Christ was high and lifted up. Still today, we look up to see his majesty.

Now look at the vertical piece of the cross. It stretches from east to west. It reminds us of the stretched open arms of Christ - arms to embrace the whole world.

I would like for you to pray today in one of two ways. Pray a simple sentence prayer of thanks for what Jesus did for you on the cross, or take a moment to pray for those in your life who need to come to Christ.

After you have prayed, please light a candle on the cross.

If you pray a "thank you" prayer, light a candle that is in the horizontal line of the cross.

If you pray a "request" for salvation, please light a candle in the vertical line of the cross.

Let's pray...

WITH GREAT LOVE

READ THIS:

Worship is a lifestyle.

What kind of worship does the Lord require? Does He demand great acts of self sacrifice or simple acts of humility? So often we believe that loving God and living a life of worship is one monumental act after another. Consequently, most of us give up. We know we aren't up to the task of living large all the time!

Mother Teresa once said, "We can do no great things—only small things with great love." Isn't our worship of the Lord God Almighty about love, love for Him and love for one another? It is indeed. Our worship is not about big acts...but all the seemingly insignificant things we do in love.

Take a minute and make a list of all the activities you are involved in on any given day. List your work and your chores around the house and the driving you do to get your kids from place to place. List them all.

(give 3-5 minutes to do this)

READ THIS:

Now, I want to take a few minutes of silent prayer. Let's renew our commitment to live our lives as worship. Pray that God will bless our acts of living worship and that we will do everything in love, no matter what it is.

(close this time of silent prayer by speaking a word of prayer for your group)

QUIETNESS

READ THIS:

To be quiet is to be in a state of gentle stillness. It is in this state that your mind can relax because there is not all kinds of sensory input. Your body can then follow suit and your muscles loosen up. When you fully enter into a state of quietness, it is there that you let go of those things that are weighing you down. You can give up the struggle for control. You can release the notion that you must know everything right now! You can see God's face more clearly and hear His word to you more plainly.

Today we are going to take a few minutes and practice the discipline of quietness. You can stay where you are seated, or you can move to another place here or outside. Get comfortable and stay put once you find your place. Take out your Bible and read the following Psalms and allow God to renew you and refresh you in this time of quietness.

- Psalm 4
- Psalm 23
- Psalm 46

After about 10 minutes call your group back together. Ask them about this experience. Was it difficult to get quiet? How long was it before you actually could relax? Why is it important to spend time in quietness?

READ THIS:

Around the great issues of life there is quietness. Silence characterizes the highest in art and the deepest in nature. The surest spiritual search is made in silence. Moses learned in Midian, and Paul in Arabia, what would have eluded them in the busy haunts of men.

Silence reaches beyond words. The highest point in drama is silence. The most valid emotions do not cry aloud. The most effective reproof is not a tongue lashing. The most poignant grief is not expressed in loud shriekings. The sincerest sympathy is not noisy. The best preparation for an emergency is quietness.

The best proof of greatness is silence. The great engine is almost noiseless, but the cheap model is a "rattletrap." The best proof of confidence is silence. The man who is confident of his position does not strive, nor cry aloud, nor try to explain everything.

"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (Isaiah 30:15).

OUR GOD IS CLOSE

Our God is not a far away, somewhere in the sky, kind of God. He does not rule from a throne placed out of reach, but rules from a throne within in our hearts. He is close. When we are in trouble, He is close. When we are laughing, He is close. When we are alone, He is close. When we are in a crowd, He is close.

1. Assign the following scriptures to different readers in your group. Have them read their passages out loud for the group. Make a note to the group that God is close to us. Jeremiah 23:23-24; Isaiah 40:10-11; Psalm 34:1-20
2. Ask your group, "What is usually happening around you, or to you, when you most feel that God is close? Is it during happy times, sad times, trying times?" Do not allow them to answer now; you are simply getting the thought process started.
3. Give each person a piece of paper and a pen/pencil.
4. Ask your group to close their eyes and sit for a few minutes, reflecting on a time or times when they sensed that God was close to them. You may want to play instrumental music quietly while you are reflecting.
5. Encourage the group members to write down what they remember about that specific time, what was happening, and how they sensed God was near, etc. If they so choose, they could draw a picture instead of writing.
6. After about 5-10 minutes, ask if anyone would be willing to share what he or she wrote or drew.
7. Read together the following responsive praise prayer from Psalm 34. The leader reads the bold, and the participant reads the regular font.

I will bless God every chance I get; my lungs expand with His praise.

I live and breathe God who is close by.

God has met me more than halfway, and He has freed me from my anxious fears.

I live and breathe God who is close by.

When I was desperate, I called out and God got me out of a tight spot.

I live and breathe God who is close by.

His angels set up a circle of protection around us while we pray. We will open our eyes and see—how good God is.

I live and breathe God who is close by.

Blessed are we if we run to Him.

I live and breathe God who is close by.

God keeps an eye on his friends; His ears pick up every moan and groan. Is anyone crying for help? God is listening, ready to rescue you.

I live and breathe God who is close by.

If your heart is broken, you will find God right there. If you are kicked in the gut, He will help you catch your breath. God is there every time.

I live and breathe God who is close by.

Thank God, praise God, love this mighty God who is close by.

Amen.

LIFE'S SMALL PLEASURES

READ THIS:

Most of us miss out on life's big prizes, (The Pulitzer, the Nobel, Oscar, Tonys, Emmys), But we're all eligible for life's small pleasures: A pat on the back. A kiss on the cheek. A four-pound bass. A full moon. An empty parking space. A crackling fire. A great meal. A glorious sunset. Hot soup. Don't fret about missing life's grand awards. Enjoy its tiny delights. There are plenty for all of us.

It is true that most of us will never win an Emmy or a Pulitzer, but we still are given the privilege of tiny delights. Take a few minutes and think of some of those activities, people, and occurrences that comprise your "tiny delights." (*You may want to give everyone an index card to write them down.*)

After a few moments, ask your group to share what they wrote on their index cards as a way to begin their praise time. After they have shared these "tiny delights," have them turn to Psalm 103. What you will find here is the "great delight" of our lives. After you have read this Psalm, ask your group to respond in praise by reading the following phrases. Go around the circle reading one phrase per person until all of the phrases have been read.

I will bless the Lord.

I will lift up the Lord as my redeemer and my king.

I will thank the Lord. He has been good to me.

I will never stop talking of His ways, perfect and just.

I was sinking in the quicksand of sin, and God threw me a rope of hope.

I will rejoice over my salvation.

I will sing of His mercies which are new every morning.

I will dance on the mountaintop for my joy is complete in Him.

I will speak of His love for the lost and that I have been found.

I will praise the Lord.

I will honor the Lord.

I will serve the Lord.

I will love the Lord.

I will obey the Lord.

With everything within me, I will bless the Lord. Amen.

A PSALM OF SACRIFICE

READ Romans 12:1-2 THEN ASK:

How do we live our lives as a "living sacrifice"? How important is it to our relationship with God to be offering a sacrifice to Him? Explain.

Assign portions of the paraphrase below to each of your group members, then take turns reading the Psalm of Sacrifice. To get everyone involved make sure you read around the circle or assign different passages by highlighting and handing out the reading to specific people.

A Psalm of Sacrifice

The Lord has said unto us, "I want your love and loyalty, not your wealth, nor your time. I want you to know me, not to give me offerings that cost you nothing of the spirit.

And yet, so often we have responded to God with rote prayers of repentance and petition.

Is God not saying to us today, "When you bring only your starved spirit and bitter attitude to the glorious life you have been given, isn't that wrong? When you bring unforgiveness and hatefulness to me as the choices you continue to make, isn't that wrong? Try offering it to your boss. Would he accept it from you? Would he welcome you as part of the team?"

"Now try asking me to be kind to you. This is what you are doing! Giving me the broken down side of your life, the part of your life that is putrid and half-hearted. Should I be pleased with that?"

Instead, should we not, as Christ's chosen, offer more to the Lord our God? Should not our lives be more like a soothing aroma that is burned as a sacrifice of praise? Our simple, heart-felt praise is what God accepts and what pleases Him.

Yes, we must confess the name of Jesus continually. We must call Him Lord and Redeemer and our Beginning and our End. We must always be ready to speak of His goodness and His mercy.

For Jesus alone is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Thankfully it was not because we were so good and worthy and loving that Jesus gave His life for us, but that God loved us so much that he gave his only Son as a sacrifice to cancel the great debt of sinfulness that we had run up.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

What do we do to repay Him for his great love? Doing what is right and fair and decent. This is more acceptable to the Lord than offering a sacrifice just because it is expected.

I will do as the Lord asks, and I will bring a song of thanksgiving to Him as a sacrifice.

Instead of relying on myself or my family or my friends, I will call on the name of the Lord to be my help and my strength.

O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will tell about your love and your grace given to me.

I know you are not happy with any sacrifice.

Otherwise, I would offer one to you.

You are not pleased with burnt offerings.

The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit, one that knows they are nothing without you.

Lord, let my prayer be accepted as sweet-smelling incense in your presence. Let the lifting up of my hands in prayer be accepted as an evening sacrifice. Amen.

Taken from the following scriptures:

Hosea 6:6

Malachi 1:8-9

Philippians 4:18

Hebrews 13:15

1 John 2:2

1 John 4:10

Proverbs 15:8

Proverbs 21:3

Psalms 141:2

Psalms 116:17

Psalms 51:15-17

I PRAISE YOU BECAUSE...

Take the following phrases and cut them into individual strips of paper. Hand these out as your group members come in. If there are more phrases than group members, give each person two or more.

READ THIS:

Praise is not a thank you but an acknowledgement of who God is. Take time to praise God before you study about him, thank him, or petition him. We must constantly remind ourselves that God is awesome and glorious. When we do that, our hearts are molded to a way of living and loving.

Have your group take a minute and elaborate on what some of these ideas mean by reading the sentence out loud and answering one of the following questions about it:

What does your phrase mean to you personally.

If you really believed this phrase, how would you live your life differently?

Lastly, take turns reading these phrases of praise out loud to the Lord. Finish by praying a prayer of praise to God.

I praise you because You are Wonderful... you inspire wonder.

I praise you because You are the Lion of Judah... you cannot be tamed.

I praise you because You are the I AM.... You are everything.

I praise you because You are the counselor... probing and guiding.

I praise you because You are the Creator... the maker of the heavens and the earth.

I praise you because You are Almighty... you have the power to heal the body and the mind.

I praise you because You are the Lord... good and fair and worthy of our labor.

I praise you because You are the Bread of Life... you sustain me and give me what I need to live each day.

I praise you because You are the Alpha and Omega... where I begin and where I end.

I praise you because You are my high place... I hide in your shadows and take rest in your strength.

I praise you because You are King of Kings... you are powerful and awesome... I must kneel in your presence.

I praise you because You are able... you are huge and you can do anything, anytime.

I praise you because You are the Deliverer... you have freed me from my oppressors.

NOONE BUT OUR GOD

1. Sing a praise song or Read Psalm 113.
2. Read the following responsive reading.
3. Ask your group: What do you most love about our God?
4. Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for the way God takes care of us.

Leader: There is no god like our God. There is no other god who fights for us or forgives us without punishment first. There is no other god who lavishes gifts and teaches that we do the same. There is no other god who gives himself so fully to those who so often ignore Him.

Group: No one but our God would care so much.

Leader: Who will go before us and level the obstacles that stand in our way?

Group: No one but our God.

Leader: Who will subdue our enemies, those enemies of our minds and our spirits?

Group: No one but our God.

Leader: Who can say to the oceans, "Dry up" and they obey?

Group: No one but our God commands such presence.

Leader: Who would give unsearchable riches to those He has called?

Group: No one but our God.

Leader: Who would take an insignificant person like me and call me, by name, to do great things for Him?

Group: No one but our God chooses people like us.

Leader: Who has created the light of day and the darkness of night?

Group: No one but our God.

Leader: Who can rain down righteousness and demand that salvation spring up?

Group: No one but our God provides such a perfect balance.

Leader: Who is the potter that molds and makes the perfect object for His use?

Group: No one but our God.

Leader: Who can decide who will fall and who will rise; who will live and who will die; who will win and who will lose?

Group: No one but our God has the power to dictate life.

Leader: There is no other God like our God. He is awesome, brilliant and commanding. He is all powerful, all knowing, all places and all loving. Who could call us to serve him, to bow down in worship before Him, to love Him passionately and to give all to Him?

Group: No one but our God.

Leader: You are so right. There is no one like our God!

LIVE LIKE YOU WERE DYING

1. Read the following passage to your group (if you prefer you can read it from another translation but The Message is easy to understand.).
2. Ask your group: What is this passage saying to us?
3. Ask: In what ways can we be "vigilant" until Jesus comes again?
4. Play the Tim McGraw song: Live like you were dying.
5. Ask your group: What is the message of this song?
6. Ask your group: How is the message from the lyrics and the scripture passage alike? How is it different? Ultimately, what should your life be about?
7. Spend a few minutes in silent prayer.
8. Have your group pray the following prayer by repeating you, one sentence at a time.

Dear Lord,
We wait with great anticipation for your return.
What a day that will be!
We will stay awake Lord.
We will be about your kingdom business.
We will live each day as if you are coming tomorrow.

We will live each day as if we were dying.
Lord, give us wisdom.
Give us joy.
Give us your power.
We will be vigilant.
We will choose the best,
sacrifice what we must,
and live with You always on our minds.
We will not grow weary of serving You.
You are an awesome God.
We love you.
We worship you.
Amen.

Matthew 24:42-51 (The Message)

"So stay awake, alert. You have no idea what day your Master will show up. But you do know this: You know that if the homeowner had known what time of night the burglar would arrive, he would have been there with his dogs to prevent the break-in. Be vigilant just like that. You have no idea when the Son of Man is going to show up.

"Who here qualifies for the job of overseeing the kitchen? A person the Master can depend on to feed the workers on time each day. Someone the Master can drop in on unannounced and always find him doing his job. A God-blessed man or woman, I tell you. It won't be long before the Master will put this person in charge of the whole operation.

"But if that person only looks out for himself, and the minute the Master is away does what he pleases— abusing the help and throwing drunken parties for his friends— the Master is going to show up when he least expects it and make hash of him. He'll end up in the dump with the hypocrites, out in the cold shivering, teeth chattering.