

Leading Small Groups With Purpose, Lesson #7
Book by Steve Gladen; This Study Guide by Josh Hunt
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Chapters 13 - 14 Worship

OPEN

Let's each share your name and what is the best time of worship you have ever experienced?

DIG

1. **Steve starts chapter 13 by pointing out that we normally think of worship is the worship service—specifically, the music. But, worship is much more than that. How would you define worship? What is worship?**

This first purpose of your life is called worship. It is your number one responsibility on earth. "Some people have missed the most important thing in life—they don't know God." You may know a lot about a lot of things, but if you don't know God personally, you're missing the first reason you were created.

Worship is far more than going to a church service. Worship is a lifestyle of enjoying God, loving him, and giving ourselves to be used for his purposes. We worship God by enjoying him! C. S. Lewis said, "In commanding us to glorify him, God is inviting us to enjoy him." God wants our worship to be motivated by love, thanksgiving, and delight, not duty. When you use your life for God's glory, everything you do can become an act of worship. The Bible says, "Use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God." Until you begin fulfilling this first purpose, you won't be able to fulfill the other four. — Warren, R. (2011). *What On Earth Am I Here For? Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

2. **What are some examples of acts of worship? What does worship look like?**

In *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren called surrender the heart of worship. "True worship— bringing God pleasure—happens when you give yourself completely to God," he said. I agree. Although actions can be a part of worship, it has much more to do with your perspective than what you are actually doing.

First, anything you do—that you've surrendered to his truth—can be an act of worship. That means anything from sharing your faith to playing with your children to enjoying your favorite movie can be an act of worship if you are living in total surrender to God.

Music can be an act of worship—but it doesn't have to be. When we roll into church on Sunday morning and sing a song just to check off another item on our to-do list, that's not worship. It's just singing. On the other hand, taking a nap—when we've surrendered control over all of the

unmanageable events of life, when we've relaxed into the all-powerful hands of our Lord—can be a powerful statement of worship, particularly in a world that constantly relates busyness to value.

Further, obedience is an act of worship. One of the Hebrew words for “worship” is *abad*, which refers to working or serving as when a slave serves a master. Worship in scripture tied closely to that concept. To worship God is to do what he asks of us. Yet unlike slaves, we serve our Master out of gratitude and love.

Finally, surrender is an act of worship. It's worship when we surrender our own misguided ideas about our purpose and instead accept God's vision of what we were made for, including God's four other eternal purposes for our life: fellowship, spiritual maturity, ministry, and evangelism. Worship is the beginning, middle, and the culmination of the purpose-driven life. When we surrender our lives to the care of our spiritual family, the Church, when we make decisions that reveal how we are becoming more like Jesus, when we use our S.H.A.P.E.—Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, Experiences—to serve others, and when we tell others what God has done in our lives, we are worshiping.

Want to worship God? Live your life as God intended you to live it. Give up your plan and accept his. That means giving to God the ultimate act of worship—the surrender of your life to his purposes (ROMANS 12:1). — Muchow, R., & Warren, R. (2006). *The Worship Answer Book: More Than A Music Experience*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

3. Why should we worship? Why is worship important? How important is it?

It may sound simple, but we worship God because we love God, and we love God because God first loved us.

We were made in the image of the perfect love between God the Father, Son, and Spirit (1GENESIS 1:26), created to love and to be loved. God designed us to be at home in his perfect love, and it is God's love in us that compels us to love him and to love others: “Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (JOHN 4:11).

Through Christ, God enters into a very personal union with each of us, not conceptually, not theoretically, not metaphorically . . . but ACTUALLY! He makes the first move to bridge the huge gap between the holy and the sinful, between his perfect love and our flawed love. Through Jesus, God established forever that genuine love is always personal—from a Person through a Person to a person.

Because the love of God is intimate and personal, the love flowing from you back to him—your worship of him—should be equally intimate and personal.

God's love doesn't stop at diagnosing our problems or judging our faults (PSALM 103:10); rather he moves to address the needs of our broken lives. Through worship, God brings fullness where there once was emptiness (COLOSSIANS 2:9–10); he brings life where there once was death (EPHESIANS 2:1, 5); he brings reconciliation where there once was separation (ROMANS 5:10–11).

To truly and deeply believe that God is perfectly loving us is the truth that sets us free from self-consciousness and self-absorption (ROMANS 12:2). As we embrace this love from God, we are drawn to worship him in a real and authentic way, the way we would be drawn to those we love the most.

The more we are conscious of God's love for us, the less self-conscious we become. Love begins to set the course of our lives, and worship becomes a natural outpouring of our transformed hearts. — Muchow, R., & Warren, R. (2006). *The Worship Answer Book: More Than A Music Experience*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

4. Why is it important that we worship as a small group? Why not just leave this to the worship service?

A group which has experienced fifteen minutes of genuine worship together cannot move easily into petty arguments about church business. Worship unites like nothing else. If your small group is dull, disunited or disintegrating, encourage true worship as part of the agenda. Even a church board might benefit from a few moments of praising and adoring God. Try it next time before jumping into a hard issue and see how the rest of the meeting goes. — Barker, S. (1997). *Good Things Come in Small Groups: The Dynamics of Good Group Life* (p. 24). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

5. Which is more important, worship or missions & evangelism?

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God. "The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!" (Ps. 97:1). "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (Ps. 67:3-4).

But worship is also the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish. Missionaries will never call out, "Let the nations be glad!" who cannot say from the heart, "I rejoice in the Lord.... I will be glad and exult in you, I will sing praise to your name, O Most High" (Ps. 104:34; 9:2). Missions begins and ends in worship.

If the pursuit of God's glory is not ordered above the pursuit of man's good in the affections of the heart and the priorities of the church, man will not be well served, and God will not be duly honored. I am not pleading for a diminishing of missions but for a magnifying of God. When the flame of worship burns with the heat of God's true worth, the light of missions will shine to the darkest peoples on earth. And I long for that day to come!

Where passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak. Churches that are not centered on the exaltation of the majesty and beauty of God will scarcely kindle a fervent desire to "declare his glory among the nations" (Ps. 96:3). Even outsiders feel the disparity between the boldness of our claim upon

the nations and the blandness of our engagement with God. — *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*. John Piper

6. How would you contrast the importance of worship versus ministry? Which would you say is most important and why?

When did we decide that relevant need-meeting was superior to awesome God-meeting? We have settled for the horizontal and become comfortable leading and attending churches that God does not. Sailing is only delightful when the wind blows, and church without the transcendent leaves us dead in the water. Does your heart hunger for the miraculous in church where God's power is manifested in measurable ways? — MacDonald, J. (2012). *Vertical Church: What Every Heart Longs For. What Every Church Can Be*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

7. Steve talks about expressive and reflective worship. What is an example of expressive worship?

Following are examples of expressive worship for groups:

Prayer. Whether as a group or as individuals, make audible prayer a part of every small group meeting. That doesn't mean forcing each member of the group to pray out loud, but give every member the chance to do so.

Thanksgiving. Go around the group and ask members to say one sentence of thanks to God for something specific in their life.

Music. This can be low-volume music played in the background during prayer time or an all-out worship fest right in your living room. The idea is to do something that works for your group.

In our small group, John is our unofficial worship leader. Not too long after he started coming to the group, I learned he loves music and plays the guitar. When I chatted with him about his passions, I learned he likes to lead worship. But when I asked him to lead worship for our group, he said, "No, I'm not qualified." This is where most people start, never believing they are ready. But through some encouragement and leading (okay, pushing), John agreed to give it a try. His first time out of the gate was a bit shaky, but over time he has led us in some awesome times of worship.

John grew by taking a risk, but his willingness to step out in faith also encouraged another guy in our group to step out and lead worship too. Now do the two of them think they are the worship champions for our group? No. But are they the worship champions of our group? Yes. Every role in our group has started out like that. In developing roles, just think crawl, walk, run. Everyone starts by crawling, then gradually he or she begins to walk, and before you know it, that person is off and running.

Encouraging John accomplished a couple of things: (1) Our group benefits from John's gifts because he is really good at what he does. (2) John's increased involvement in the group gives him a sense of ownership. He feels like he's contributing and making a difference with the gifts God has given him. He may not know the Bible well, and he may not really know how to share his faith yet, but he knows how to worship and love God. — Gladen, S. M. (2011). *Small Groups With Purpose: How To Create Healthy Communities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

8. Steve speaks of times of solitude and meditation. How can solitude and meditation be used in small group worship?

Silence and meditation

- Often we think all our time in a group should be verbal. Take a few minutes to pray and meditate silently. (Placed at appropriate times, members may want to share after this time or begin to quietly talk again.)
- To prepare people for this experience it may be helpful to ask group members to close their eyes while one person reads Revelation 4. Group members should focus on being in the presence of God without feeling compelled to talk. Listen to God.

Barker, S. (1997). *Good Things Come in Small Groups: The Dynamics of Good Group Life* (p. 162). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

9. What are some examples of reflective worship?

Following are examples of reflective worship for small groups:

Silent prayers. Take time to be still and listen. Give group members time to silently commune with God.

Solitude moments. Have a small group meeting during which members are asked to go away by themselves with their Bible for an hour. This can be done outside in a park setting or just in a home by allowing members to go to different parts of the house and then come back together and share with other members of the group. Or an alternative is to come back together for a simple prayer and then release members while they are still in a contemplative mood.

Meditation. Meditate on passages of Scripture. Perhaps provide group members with paper and pens to write their thoughts after meditation.

Fasting. Encourage group members to go on a two- or three-day group fast—whether from food or an activity. Be available to support each other during the week via emails and phone calls. (See www.smallgroups.net/fasting for a guide to fasting.) — Gladen, S. M. (2011). *Small Groups With Purpose: How To Create Healthy Communities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

10. But the Steve mean by, “sharing God stories” is a form of worship?

Psalm 26:6–7 (The Message) I scrub my hands with purest soap, then join hands with the others in the great circle, dancing around your altar, GOD, Singing God-songs at the top of my lungs, telling God-stories.

11. Anyone have a God story? How have you seen God at work in recent days?

Except for one small problem. He was slowly sinking into a pattern of addiction, which eventually started to ruin his otherwise picture-perfect marriage. His emotional life was unraveling. In a fit of desperation, his wife turned to the church, ultimately finding Christ.

Partly in an effort to save her from what he suspected was a cult, Brad showed up at church. Actually, he finally admitted that she had dragged him there. But he had been determined to show her she was deceived, caught up in a religious sideshow that had no basis in fact or reality.

Each week Brad was warmly greeted by ushers and sat patiently through services, looking for his opportunity to expose the charade. You can imagine his surprise when, sometime around his fifth week, a hospitality team greeter asked, “Hey, would you like to serve with us? We need some help handing out the weekly programs.”

Politely but directly Brad said, “Can I tell you something? First of all, I don’t even believe in God. And second, I don’t even think I like this church.” The greeter responded, “That’s okay. Can you do this?” and stretched out his arm to hand Brad a program. “Can you hand these out each week? That’s no big deal, is it?” Brad conceded. But then the other shoe dropped. There was a catch.

“Before we hand out programs, we meet together for prayer—it’s part of what we do. Since you have agreed to help, you’ll need to be there about twenty minutes early for the prayer time.” It was too late to back out, so Brad said, “I’ll tell you what. I’ll show up early, but I’m not saying a word.”

Brad looked me in the eye at lunch and filled in the blanks of the story. “Week after week I showed up and listened to these men pray, share their hearts, and meet each other’s needs. I thought to myself, They really believe this stuff! For three months I had an open window into their lives—the good, the bad, and the ugly.” After experiencing the team atmosphere and seeing lives change, Brad felt God at work in him.

One hospitality team member also led a seeker group, designed to address the questions many skeptics ask about Christ and Christianity. He invited Brad to attend—three times. After two negative responses, Brad finally said yes and joined a little community of skeptics just like him. A few months later, he became a follower of Christ. And over the next few years, Brad matured in group life and eventually became a small group leader and coach.

The journey from skeptic to leader took almost four years, and now Brad was beginning a new adventure. Just months before our lunch, the pastor had rocked Brad’s world again, by asking him to lead the growing small groups ministry at the church. And Brad accepted, cutting his veterinary work back so he could come on staff part time. So here they were—a pastor and his new part-time small groups pastor, asking how to grow the ministry that had changed their lives so dramatically. It was a lunch I will never forget.

And it all happened because one task group leader really got it and said, “What if we reach out in the midst of the task and change lives? What if we provide a connection to community in the midst of the task? Maybe—just maybe—we can touch the life of someone far from God.”

Never downplay the opportunity you have to foster spiritual growth through works of service. It could be the spiritual-growth experience of your life! — Donahue, B., & Robinson, R. (2009). *Walking The Small Group Tightrope: Meeting The Challenges Every Group Faces*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

12. What are some creative ways we can pray as a small group?

Envision yourself as a small group leader with people who don't know how to pray or are intimidated by prayer. You are not going to start out with deep, joy-filled times of prayer. It can be extremely awkward at first, but with practice you will find prayer can be the part of the small group that people look forward to the most. Here are some suggestions related to what you can pray for and how you can initiate group prayer:

■ Deciding what to pray for. To start with, you could occupy your time praying for each member of the group, asking God to help you grow in Christ. Most groups don't do this enough because it feels uncomfortable at first, but you should seek to strengthen each other by name in prayer. Then, you could pray for any of the following:

- personal needs shared in the group
- family and friends of group members
- the needs of your church or fellowship group
- sick, shut-in, suffering and/or bereaved people that group members know
- non-Christian friends, family and/or neighbors
- missions and missionaries
- and don't forget worship!

You might also go back through the sections on worship, confession and petition and make your own list of possible prayer items.

As you pray for these and other requests, you may want to keep a "prayer notebook" so that you can record answered prayers and further enhance group worship. — Arnold, J., & Black, S. (1992). *The Big Book On Small Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

13. What are some mistakes we need to be careful to avoid in small group prayer?

Problems with most small group prayer:

Stepchild syndrome: The Bible gets 40 minutes, prayer requests (not prayer) gets another 25, and prayer itself gets 2 minutes tops from the group leader. Prayer simply isn't viewed as significant as Bible study. The problem with that, is that it likely means the scriptures are not being properly understood as they place a HUGE emphasis on prayer!

Detachment from Scripture: Similar to the previous but probably the biggest problem of all. We tend to assume small group time has 2 parts: The Bible, and then prayer. So we study the bible mostly for knowledge, and then we close our bibles so that we can figure out what we need to pray about. Think about it, this is likely how you spend your personal time with God as well. Read the bible, maybe jot down some notes, then shut the bible and start praying. Why? Do we think the Bible is the "head" part

and prayer is the “heart” part of a great “devotion”? If we are honest, yes. and our small groups tend to unconsciously think the same way.

Prayer ignorance: Many in our small groups have NEVER prayed where others can hear them, and some have never really even prayed. Then, when nobody but the leader prays during the “open floor for anyone” time, we wonder why! Because people would rather DIE than embarrass themselves by sounding ridiculous trying to do some foreign spiritual talk (which is what prayer is to people who don’t know what it is).

Bellybuttons: Groups that spend their time looking and caring about no one but themselves and their needs are destined for hollow, incomplete prayer lives. We must remember that small groups are not small churches, they are arms of a local church. Your group members want to be a part of their church. When you cut them off from that and create a “lets just take care of ourselves” mentality, you give your group a false idea of what it means to be a part of a body of believers.

<http://spenceshelton.wordpress.com/2008/02/04/praying-as-a-small-group/>

14. Does anyone know what is meant by conversational prayer in a small group?

This is one of my favorite ways to pray as a group. Like a conversation, people pray in random order, as long or as briefly as they want, and can participate or just listen. If two people start talking at the same time, one backs up and allows the other to continue. — Josh Hunt. (2010). *Make Your Group Grow*.

15. What if we have non-believers in our groups? Can non-believers worship?

Nonbelievers have a limited ability to worship. Because everyone is created by God to be a worshiper, everyone is able to worship something, but only Christians can truly worship God. “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (CORINTHIANS 12:3).

First, the Bible teaches that nonbelievers cannot worship God except in these two ways:

The instant of becoming a believer, when the nonbeliever listens to God and says “yes” to him (ACTS 28:28, 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17).

The instant when every knee bows to God at the Judgment (PHILIPPIANS 2:10).

Furthermore, everyone is born with a God-shaped hole in his or her heart. Nothing can satisfy the feeling of absolute emptiness, a hunger deep inside the heart, until the hole is filled with the Spirit of God. It is this God-shaped hole that drives us to seek him. In other words, God created each person from birth to be a worshiper, and our souls will not rest until they are connected to God’s Spirit. Like a computer searching for a secure WiFi connection, we are designed by God to keep searching until we find the connection to him, or until we’re drained, like a battery, and shut down. People who do not worship God do worship something, but it is always something far less than the Master and Creator of the universe (2 CHRONICLES 7:22; DEUTERONOMY 11:16, 30:17; MATTHEW 6:24).

Finally, nonbelievers cannot truly worship during a church service; however, they can watch worship. My pastor, Rick Warren, often speaks of the evangelistic power of worship. He says:

Although unbelievers cannot truly worship, they can watch believers worship. They can observe the joy that we feel. They can see how we value God's Word and how we respond to it. They can hear how the Bible answers the problems and questions of life. They can notice how worship encourages, strengthens, and changes us. They can sense when God is supernaturally moving in a service, although they won't be able to explain it. When unbelievers watch genuine worship, it becomes a powerful witness.

The Bible teaches that as a nonbeliever observes genuine, authentic worship, God will speak to his or her heart. "But if some unbelieving outsiders walk in on a service where people are speaking out God's truth, the plain words will bring them up against the truth and probe their hearts. Before you know it, they're going to be on their faces before God, recognizing that God is among you" (1 CORINTHIANS 14:25 MSG). — Muchow, R., & Warren, R. (2006). *The Worship Answer Book: More Than A Music Experience*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

16. How often should we worship?

Christians should worship every day and should gather regularly for fellowship. Not just on Sundays. What if the week was ten days long? Would we worship every ten days? What if we missed a week? Then we would be worshipping every twenty days or so. That wouldn't make for a very close relationship with God.

We should worship whenever we are in God's presence. And when does that happen?

We live every moment of our lives in God's presence. Whether we are working or playing, eating or sleeping, minding our manners or misbehaving—God is right there. Paul told the debaters in Athens that in God "we live and move and have our being" (ACTS 17:28). The psalmist said there's nowhere we can go to get away from God—not into the darkness, not across the ocean, not even into the depths of hell (PSALM 139:7–12).

Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name." If you think worship is something that happens only in a specific place at a definite time when you are doing a particular thing, then the idea of continually worshipping will strike you as strange. But if we should worship whenever we are in God's presence—and if we are always in God's presence—then we ought to worship all the time.

Brother Lawrence, who lived in a seventeenth-century Carmelite religious community, talked about "practicing the presence" of God. He realized that he was always in the Almighty's presence, whether he was kneeling at the altar or washing dishes. When it finally dawns on us that we are continually in God's presence—no matter where we are or what we are doing—our lives are completely transformed. Even the most mundane parts of our daily routines can become holy moments as we perform those chores "as unto the Lord." — Muchow, R., & Warren, R. (2006). *The Worship Answer Book: More Than A Music Experience*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

17. How can we worship God privately?

If you are one who finds it difficult to sing, even though you feel love for God, let me offer some advice. Take some baby steps in that direction. Buy some worship CDs and sing quietly in the car by yourself. Turn the music up really loud so you can't hear yourself. When you are in church, start by mouthing the words silently, then move to a whisper, then a quiet song. Move slowly, but move. God wants to hear you sing.

Here is an assignment. If you have a minute, see if you can dig up a worship CD or cassette. Spend some time privately worshipping our great God. Tell Him how much you love Him. Tell Him how grateful you are. Thank Him. Adore Him. Worship Him.

God is here now with you. He wants to hear from you. Grab a CD and go. If you don't have a CD, try to buy one the next time you are in a Christian book store. And if you don't have any music, just close your eyes and worship God through words. In fact, you might write out a love letter to God right now. — Josh Hunt. (2000). *Enjoying God*. Josh Hunt.

18. What is the best place to worship?

When we have an encounter with God, the place where we met him becomes very special to us. One such place for me is the sanctuary of our church building. Even if it is dark and empty, I sense God's presence. Memories of wonderful worship experiences flood my soul. But worship is more about relationship than about place.

A Samaritan woman talking with Jesus once raised the issue of where to worship: "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus replied, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. . . . Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (JOHN 4:19–21, 23–24).

First, notice that Jesus answered the "where" question by saying "in spirit and in truth." The believer's spirit is his essence, the very core of his being. The Great Commandment tells us to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Truth is the freedom we experience in genuine worship under a new covenant. We are not enslaved by a list of rules and regulations about worship. Instead, the Holy Spirit lives inside each believer, and we are able to worship wherever we are, outside a church building as well as in one. Worship is not limited to a place, because we live every moment in the presence of Holy God.

Further, believers need to worship with other believers. Hebrews 10:25 says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Romans 12:4–5 says, "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." We belong to each other! Church is a family,

not a building. It is an organism, not an organization. Many churches around the world do not meet in buildings. Saddleback Church did not have its own building until it was ten years old and had five thousand attendees. The local church is Christ's precious bride: "Christ loved the church and gave his life for it" (EPHESIANS 5:25 CEV). The important thing about worship is that we are complete when we are together—and Christ is pleased to be in our midst (MATTHEW 18:20). — Muchow, R., & Warren, R. (2006). *The Worship Answer Book: More Than A Music Experience*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

19. Look over Steve's practical suggestions for small group worship in chapter 14. Which ones do you want to try?

Although it can happen in a variety of ways, small group worship simply involves inviting each other to envision our wonderful God and enjoy being refreshed in his presence. — Beyerlein, A. (1995). *Adoring God: Worship & Prayer. In Small Group Leaders' Handbook: The Next Generation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

20. What do you want to recall from today's conversation?

21. How can we support one another in prayer this week?