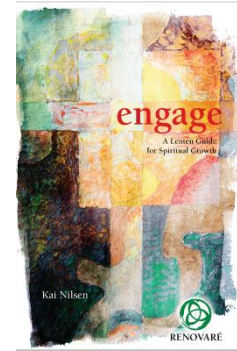


Engage: Worship

Session One



Welcome to your small group! We are grateful that you are taking part. May you find new faith practices, new insights, and new connections with others to deepen your life of faith.

This guide for small group discussion is based on the Renovaré resource, Engage, written, compiled and edited by Pastor Kai Nilsen with contributions from Keith Matthews, Kathie Nycklemoe and Eric Magnusson and the Renovaré team. Download Engage: A Lenten Guide for Spiritual Growth from Renovaré at: www.renovare.org/books/engage.

Opening Questions

- What draws you to this small group or theme? What is something you hope for in this small group experience?
- Tell about a location or an experience that fills you with a sense of awe or wonder.
- What are some of the practices you have followed during the season of Lent and Holy Week, either as a child or as an adult? Has anything been especially meaningful for you?

Introduction

"Worship didn't do anything for me today." "I didn't get anything out of it." "It was so boring. I didn't feel anything." "I don't have time to get to worship this weekend. I have so much to do."

Notice the focus of each statement. I... I... I... Worship, properly understood, shifts the focus. Worship focuses our minds on God. "We engage ourselves with, dwell upon, and express the greatness, beauty and goodness of God." (Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, p.177) In that way, worship is profoundly counter-cultural. We offer ourselves not for what we will get or feel but because God's presence and gracious goodness is worthy of praise.

We also diminish worship when we think about it primarily as something we do for an hour a week or, in our contemporary church world, when we make a distinction between the time of singing (which we call worship) and the rest of the service. Worship is an event but it is also a posture of living. We live our lives in worshipful response to God's goodness when, daily, we speak words of thanks and praise to God and live lives of loving service, not for what we will gain, but simply to say thank you to God.

What Does the Bible Say?

What do these Scripture texts tell us about worship?

Revelation 4:11

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created.

- What makes God worthy of our honor and worship?

Hosea 6:6

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

- Sometimes we focus only on “doing worship” and not on what the act of worship can produce in us by God’s grace. How does your worship enhance your desire to experience and express God’s steadfast love?

Supplement—

Look at Matthew 28 and Matthew 14 with Pastor Joel Vander Wal at the end of this session. This can be used individually or together as a group.

What Do Our Guides Say?

Richard Foster

“Worship is our responding to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father.” (Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p.138)

- How do you define “worship”? What is included in it?
- What are the ways you worship, besides going to church on Sunday?
- What do you think of Richard Foster’s description of worship (above)? What do you resonate with? What might be a new idea for you?

What Do Others Say?

Pastor Kai Nilsen

One of the curses of being in ministry is the tendency to evaluate worship experiences rather than enter them with a spirit of honor and praise. I watch the movement of people, listen for the competency of the musicians, critique the theology or delivery of the pastor’s sermon. In doing so, worship becomes production, not praise. I could simply say it’s an occupational hazard. But, it’s also a sin, a distortion of God’s intent for worship.

All Saint’s Sunday, in the congregation I serve, is always a corrective to my self-absorbed view of worship. As hundreds of people, young and old, healthy and frail, line the aisles in mournful

procession to light a candle for a loved one who has died, my “self” is yanked from the center of my attention. It’s not about me. God is light in darkness, hope to the despairing, an all-embracing presence of love as intimate as the gently rolling tears and as transcendent as the power to life eternal. All I can say is “thank you.”

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- What resonates with you from this reading or another part of the session? What is a new idea or thought for you?
- What draws you to worship? What do you hope happens?
- Worship is an interactive time of both giving and receiving. Does it seem easier to focus on the giving side or the receiving side?
- Share a time of worship or an experience when all you could say was, “Thank you, God.”
- Talk about a time in worship when you sensed God’s presence.
- What gets in the way of being fully present to God in worship? What brings you back to a sense of being in God’s presence?
- What are some ways we can “worship” God in daily life, in addition to a Sunday worship experience?
- How does Sunday worship carry over into the week for you?

Faith Practice – What Can I Do?

Weekly:

- Choose to think of worship as an offering of praise and thanks to God first, rather than entering with the mindset of “What will I get out of it?”
- Prepare for worship by arriving early and sitting quietly in prayer, reading a Scripture text, or reading through the prayers in the beginning of the hymnal.
- Try worshipping in a different way – try a different service, sit in a different location, or attend on Wednesday evening (during Lent or Advent). What do you notice?
- Use the reflection guide at the end of this session or read the supplement, *Worship as a Spiritual Practice*.
- Bring a friend to worship.

Daily:

- Each day this week, keep these words on your lips, “Thank you, God!” When you wake in the morning, thank God for a new day. When you experience the beauty of creation or laughter or holy tears, say “Thank you, God.” Challenge yourself to find multiple ways every day to offer thanks to God.
- Select a Scripture verse or a phrase from one of the writers to carry with you throughout the week.
- Pray for each person in your small group this week.

Closing Prayer

Allow for a moment of silence.

God, who is always present with us, we praise you and give you thanks. There is a longing in our hearts for you. There is a longing in our hearts for the love we find in you. Help us to be messengers of your love to others in our lives and in the world. Thank you for bringing us together today. Guide us as we go from this place and continue to reflect. Be with each person here today, with love and grace, until we are together again. Amen.

Share the date, time and location for the next gathering.

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline*. HarperOne, 2018. www.harpercollins.com

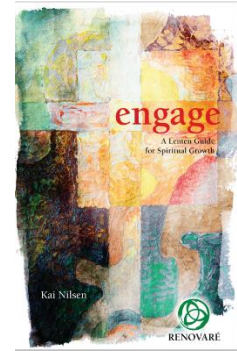
Nilsen, Kai, and Keith Matthews, Kathie Nycklemoe, Eric Magnusson & the Renovare Team. *Engage: A Lenten Guide for Spiritual Growth*. Renovare. 2014. www.renovare.org.

Scripture texts are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV), copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States.

Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. HarperOne, 1999. www.harpercollins.com and www.dwillard.org

Engage—Reflection Time

Before the next gathering, spend a few minutes quietly reflecting, journaling or writing a few notes on one or more of these reflection questions.



Faith Practice Questions: Worship

- What do you think about this practice?
- For you, what is the core intention or hope of this practice?
- What is helpful about the practice? What is challenging or difficult? What do you wonder about?
- What are various ways to do this practice, keeping in mind the purpose?

Insights for the Journey:

- How have you experienced God's presence this week?
- How has your connection with yourself, with others deepened because of your intentional work with this discipline?
- What about this discipline will you continue to build into your life?
- Ask God for continued guidance and encouragement as you make the journey of this season.

Engage—Supplement

Worship as a Spiritual Practice

Pastor Joel Vander Wal - created as part of the Wednesday Bible Study



What comes to mind for you when you think about worship? Is it music? Is it prayer? Is it lifting your hands to the heavens in adoration? In the New Testament there are six different Greek words translated as “worship” in English. The most common one, “*proskuneō*,” we find in other Greek texts around that same time, describing worship as devotees laying prostrate before and kissing the feet of idols. Two of the thirteen times that Matthew uses “*proskuneō*,” he also used the word “doubt”—the only times in the Greek New Testament that that Greek word is used. As you read the two passages below, consider how “worship” and “doubt” might be related.

Matthew 28:16-20 (NRSV)

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age.”

Matthew 14: 28-33 (NRSV)

Immediately [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying ‘It is a ghost!’ and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out “Lord, save me !” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt? When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him saying, Truly you are the Son of God.”

Questions to ponder:

- What strikes you most about these stories of “worship” and “doubt”?
- How might these stories encourage you to bring your doubts to Jesus in worship?
- What further questions do you have about the relationship between “worship” and “doubt”?