

Discipleship Groups

Week 14

As your people gather, welcome them, and help them to greet one another.

When it's time to begin, welcome them as a group. Since you are the one who knows what the previous weeks' conversations have been, you are in the best position to judge what follow-up may be appropriate at the beginning of each week's session. You are the one in a position to make sure that there is a personal connection from week to week.

You may include the question that the early Methodists asked one another in their small groups: *How is it with your soul?* It is a personal sharing question. Assure your members that they are free to answer it in the way that they interpret it individually. The only wrong answer is an untrue one.

After the initial conversation and the "soul question," lead a brief follow-up discussion of this past week's prayer exercise. Our assignment was to be deliberate about including "complaint" or "lament" in our praying. As you reflect on the past week, consider the following questions together:

- Are "complaint" and "lament" distinct in your mind? How do you define each? What is the benefit of each?
- What was your experience of trying to include "complaining" or "lamenting" in your praying? Was it comfortable or uncomfortable? Did it seem inappropriate? Did it feel liberating?
- What did you learn? How did you grow?

Next, transition the group to watching this week's video together. The video can be downloaded or it can be played from the web site.

Following the video, invite the group to discuss the video along these lines:

- Do you recognize that praise and adoration are part of your human love relationships?
- Is the distinction between praise and thanksgiving sensible and meaningful to you?
- Does "praise" or "adoration" feel like saying "I love you" to God?
- How has praise been more or less a part of your prayer life over the years?

Distribute to your group members copies of the next two pages, which offer some guidelines for this week's focus on praise and adoration.

Close your time with a brief prayer on behalf of the whole group.

Before everyone is dismissed, remind the group members about your next meeting time and place, as well as encouraging them to pray for one another each day between now and then.

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These sheets represent a week-long exercise in praise. As you embark on it, please keep in mind these two guidelines.

1. Don't read ahead. Focus each day on what is written and assigned for that day. To read ahead is to short-circuit the process.
2. Give yourself ample time each day. Just as some meals cannot be prepared in a microwave, some spiritual things can't be achieved in a hurry. The temptation will be to perform each day's exercise hastily, to check it off and move on. That won't get the job done. Set aside twenty minutes each day for these exercises. Set a timer for yourself so that you don't keep looking at your watch. And find a space where you won't be distracted by the things around you. Or, if such a space is hard to come by, keep your eyes closed in order to help your focus.

Day One

Noticing something beautiful in passing is different from stopping to soak it in, to truly marvel at it and enjoy it. Today -- and this whole week -- is about stopping to enjoy and to marvel at God.

Your 20 minutes today should be devoted simply to thinking about God. Your focus is on His attributes. Ask yourself what He is like. Think of what you know from your own experience, from the testimony of others, and from the stories of Scriptures. And then, in the space below, write down the words that come to your mind.

The words that you list are the content of your praise, you see. You are identifying what God is like -- His attributes, His characteristics, His nature. Don't give up on your list just because you come upon a stretch when you're not writing anything down. As you are quiet and meditating on Him, still more truths about Him will come to mind.

(During the subsequent days of this week, feel free to add more attributes to your list as they occur to you.)

Day Two

During today's 20 minutes, go back through your list from Day One. See what different categories suggest themselves to you as you reflect on the attributes of God you have listed. For example, one category might be "Relational Attributes" (loving, compassionate, patient). Another category might be "Transcendent Attributes" (holy, majestic, almighty). You might identify another category as "Ethical Attributes" (just, wise, righteous).

The categories need not be hard-and-fast distinctions. They are just ways of recognizing the depth and breadth of the goodness of God. They are ways of meditating on who and what He is. And that recognition gives rise to our praise.

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Day Three

The Psalmist says, “O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together” (Psalm 34:3 NASB). When we magnify a thing, we are enabling ourselves to look at it more closely and thus to see it more clearly. And according to the Psalmist, magnifying the Lord goes hand-in-hand with exalting His name. To look closely at Him, to see Him more clearly, will inevitably result in praise.

Review your list from Day One as a way of magnifying the Lord. Meditate for a few moments on each one. Let the attributes of God that you have come to recognize become a means of looking more closely at Him, of seeing Him more clearly.

Day Four

During today’s 20 minutes, we want to practice giving expression to our praise. To that end, go back through your list from Day One and insert each attribute into a sentence of praise. See what feels most natural to you and most appropriate to say. For example, you might say, “Lord, I praise You because of Your majesty!” Or, “I love You because of You are patient!” Or, “I marvel at Your wisdom!” Or, “I thank You because You are jealous!”

Day Five

Some beauty is grand -- like mountain views and night skies. Other beauty is fine -- the colors on a butterfly’s wing, the frost on a tree, the delicate pedals of a flower. During today’s 20 minutes, meditate on both the grand and the fine beauty of God. Marvel at the attributes of God that are big, breath-taking, and overwhelming. Then marvel at the attributes of God that are intricate, subtle, and often very localized.

Day Six

During today’s 20 minutes, we want our praise to be an exercise of completing a sentence. The sentence is: “Because You are...” Say that partial sentence before each of the attributes on your list from Day One -- for example, “Because You are loving...” or “Because You are holy...” -- and then see how your heart wants to complete each sentence.

Day Seven

Our goal for today’s 20 minutes is to be, as Charles Wesley put it, “lost in wonder, love, and praise.” See yourself as surrounded by the beauty of God as you have discovered it during this week, and then let yourself marvel -- let yourself be lost in wonder, in love, and in praising Him.

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