

Aim of lesson

To help the young people to understand what worship is and to gain a balanced appreciation of the forms of worship that our Father requires and accepts.

Bible background

Psalms 148, 96.

Preparation required

Think about the young people in your group, and how receptive they are likely to be to this lesson. You should aim for as devotional an atmosphere as they can cope with, but do not try to force this upon them; the devotion should come from their own appreciation of the wonder of the Almighty.

Suggested outline of lesson

If you can, try to make the lesson an act of worship, as well as a discussion about it. If you have the opportunity, and if the young people are likely to respond, you could take the opportunity to sing some hymns with them.

What are praise and worship?

Ask the young people what they think about the words in the title. Do they mean the same thing or not? Worship is to do with our attitude to God, and praise is something we give him in response. The two thoughts come together in several passages, such as 2 Chronicles 29:30.

Get the young people to look at Psalm 148:7-13, and ask them how a mountain, a tree, or a wild animal could praise God. It obviously cannot sing or speak, but it praises God by being what God wants it to be, and in so doing showing the wonder of his creative power.

The psalm goes on to speak of men and women praising God. How can we praise God in the same way? By being what God wants us to be - people who follow his ways and are guided by his teaching. Philippians 1:9-11 speaks of a way of life that is 'to the glory and praise of God'.

The importance of worship

Talk with the young people about what worship is and what it includes, and get them to think of some examples in scripture that spring to mind. The book of Psalms overflows with praises, and many have been set to music and are used as the hymns we sing today.

Read Psalm 96 with the young people (the Authorised Version text is included in their notes, and you may like to ask them to read a part each).

Then get them to look at the text and pick out the verbs - the things the Psalm exhorts people to do. Examples are: sing; declare; give glory; praise; fear - aspects which should be paramount in our worship, and in our lives.

Examples of worship in scripture

There are many, and varied, examples of worship in the Bible, and rather than dwelling on one as 'the' correct way in which we should worship it is helpful to look at several examples and to see the balance of what the scripture is teaching.

You could spend a minute or two talking about the book of Psalms. Although superficially they look very similar, they are very varied. For example:

- They display a range of emotions, from joy to despair.
- Many are written in specific situations, in particular by David when he was fleeing from Saul or had sinned with Bathsheba.
- Many are prophetic, looking forward to the Lord Jesus.
- Some are personal and intimate, others intended for formal worship in the temple.
- Some are centred on the person writing the psalm, others centred on God and his majesty.
- Some are 'acrostic' psalms, intended presumably to be learned by heart.
- Some are formal and considered, others very emotional, calling for exuberant praise.

Depending on the size of your class, either select some of the following, or share the passages among the young people and ask them to read the verse(s), then ask one of the others to summarise what they say.

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| Genesis 24:52 | An act of personal rather than communal worship; Abraham's servant bows down in gratitude that God has brought him to the right wife for Isaac. |
| Exodus 15 | The songs of Moses and Miriam are notable examples. Dancing as part of an act of worship is rare but not unknown in scripture - David for example. |
| Leviticus 10:1-3 | This is the occasion when Nadab and Abihu offered an unacceptable worship to God. Remember also that Cain's sacrifice was not accepted. This is not intended to frighten the young people, but it is a solemn reminder that God requires us to approach him, however enthusiastic and emotional we may be, with reverence and humility. |
| 1 Chronicles 16:37-43 | Well organised people each with a job to do. |
| Nehemiah 8:5-10 | Reading of the word, exposition, vitality and joy. |

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| Psalm 137:3,4 | The captives' setting was not appropriate to instantly sing a song to praise God. We should make sure the context and attitude are correct before approaching God, not doing it for the sake of doing it, but because we want / need to. |
| Psalm 150 | Imagine a vast orchestra playing music inspired by this psalm. Everything, and everybody, is set loose to praise their maker. |
| Isaiah 29:13 | Worship that was superficial and insincere. |
| Amos 6:1, 4, 5 | A casual, complacent attitude to their worship. |
| Matthew 23:27 | The attitude of the Pharisees, wanting to seem very religious to those around them. |
| Luke 4:14-22 | Jesus worshipped in the synagogue by reading and teaching. |
| Acts 16:25 | Paul and Silas in Jail - sang praises in chains whilst in prison - converted the jail keeper by their attitude. |

So why do we worship?

Why do we praise God? Try to include these important points:

- Worship is an expression of our thoughts and our gratitude to God.
- It is the reason he created us (Numbers 14:21; Revelation 5:12,13).
- Worship is recognising God's greatness, looking at our needs and acknowledging our sin.

How do we worship?

Through discussion think about different aspects of worship:

- What about formal worship in, for example, the Breaking of Bread. In what way is there worship in all the parts of the meeting - readings and exhortation, announcements and collections?
- What part should emotion play in our worship?
- Look at the hymn 'Fill thou my life, O lord my God, in every part with praise' and discuss how it is possible in the way we live our lives to give worship to God. Philippians 1:9-11 confirms that in this way we can bring glory and praise to God. John 15:8 and 1 Peter 4:11 also speak of ways in which God is glorified in the lives of his people, and Isaiah 60:18-22 describes the kingdom, in which peace and goodness on the earth glorify our maker.

Relevance to our lives

The students need to see that because our worship and praise may seem to be less enthusiastic than in some churches around us, that it isn't less sincere.

We praise and worship God by following his commandments, coming to Sunday School is an act of worship. We do this for ourselves to show a Godly attitude and because we try to fulfil God's purpose for us. We have to decide for ourselves how best to do this.

Prayer

Almighty Lord God, who is enthroned far above us, in majesty which we cannot comprehend, we bow our heads in worship and lift our hearts in praise. May we give glory to your name not only in our words but in our thoughts and our actions, so that all our lives may be an offering which will give you pleasure. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Other suggestions for activities

The young people might like to plan an activity for the following week, selecting some hymns, readings, and preparing some thoughts and prayers. If this is helpful it could form part or all of a family service for your ecclesia.