

Communal Spiritual Practices | D-Group Curriculum

Week 1: Music Worship

INTRO

Spend some time getting acquainted by doing an ice breaker or get-to-know-you activity.

SILENCE (2 mins)*

Find a comfortable position, and settle in. Allow each of your muscles to relax as you focus on your breathing. Deeply inhale... hold for a moment... and slowly exhale. Continue this rhythm. [Give members a moment to do this.] Let go of the thoughts fighting for your attention. [Give another moment.] *What are you feeling? Where do you sense God?*

As your thoughts wander, bring your attention back to your breath. Breathe in God's presence with a deep inhale, [pause] and slowly exhale any distractions or concerns. [2 minute silence.] Take one last deep breath and allow your eyes to slowly open. Amen.

How was that experience for you? Anything particularly noticeable, difficult, or beneficial?

SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:1 "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your acceptable worship."

CONTEXT

When hearing Romans 12:1, did you notice that the appeal is for us to present ourselves (plural) as one living sacrifice (singular)? The writer of this letter, the Apostle Paul, was urging believers not to present themselves to God as separate individuals but as an interconnected whole. He was exhorting the believers to work toward becoming one diverse and unified worshipping whole. Though most Christians associate the word "worship" with music, Romans 12:1 tells us that true worship happens when we place God at the forefront of our life and allow this to bring us into unity with other Christ-followers. In a world of division and hostility, this living and breathing unity is our most acceptable and holy offering of worship, regardless if music is included or not.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

This week's spiritual discipline is communal music worship. All traditions engage music worship differently, so let's embrace these differences as good. Pay attention to what is beneficial to your faith about each worship style, rather than focusing on what you don't like. We will be listening to a set of three different kinds of music worship songs.

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Leader Note: Choose one song from each of the following categories ahead of time.

Gospel:

- [Cry Out](#) -- All Nations Worship
- [Nobody Like You Lord](#) -- Maranda Curtis
- [I Am](#) -- James Fortune

Contemporary:

- [Promises](#) -- Maverick City Music
- [Lift You High](#) -- Housefires
- [Here Again](#) -- Elevation Worship

Liturgical:

- ['Tis So Sweet To Trust In Jesus](#) -- Page CXVI
- [Rock of Ages](#) -- Ascend the Hill
- [How Deep the Father's Love for Us](#) -- Austin Stone Worship

Worshiping with others in a small group may feel strange at first. Let's press past the discomfort and focus on connecting with God. For this first song, do whatever will help you to place yourself in a worshipful posture, whether that is sitting, standing, raising your hands, clapping, dancing, etc.

Now when the second song begins, I invite us all to practice singing out loud together.

During the final song, listen carefully to the lyrics. Focus on the words being sung. Feel free to journal or meditate on the lyrics.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How was that experience for you? Which song was most impactful for you?
- How has a particular style of worship music (contemporary, gospel, liturgical, etc.) shaped you or your understanding of God?
- Before this D-Group, how would you have previously understood Romans 12:1? Has anything about your understanding of worship changed?

CLOSING PRAYER

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Week 2: Prayer Partners

INTRO

Spend some time getting acquainted by doing an ice breaker or get-to-know-you activity.

SILENCE (4 mins)*

Find a comfortable position, and settle in. Allow each of your muscles to relax as you focus on your breathing. Deeply inhale... hold for a moment... and slowly exhale. Continue this rhythm. [Give members a moment to do this.] Let go of the thoughts fighting for your attention. [Give another moment.] *What are you feeling? Where do you sense God?*

As your thoughts wander, bring your attention back to your breath. Breathe in God's presence with a deep inhale, [pause] and slowly exhale any distractions or concerns. [4 minute silence.] Take one last deep breath and allow your eyes to slowly open. Amen.

How was that experience for you? Anything particularly noticeable, difficult, or beneficial?

SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:2 "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help."

CONTEXT

It can be difficult to hold ourselves accountable for living a life that honors God. Rightfully so, because God never intended for it to be this way! Somehow, society has taught us to put up walls and hide parts of ourselves from other people. We value privacy, yet we also live in fear of loneliness. Thankfully, God knows our condition and knows what we need, even when it's scary to name it. God invites us into relationship with other Christ followers to both extend and receive unconditional acceptance, care, and exhortation. This allows God's grace, hope, and healing to shine through the life of one human being into another. A practical example of this is prayer partners. Prayer partners is a space for honest sharing, listening, and prayer for the sake of encouragement, intercession, and empowerment. Let's talk about prayer partners!

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SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Leader Note: As a group, discuss the intention behind prayer partners. You may want to mention the difference between private prayer requests and prayer requests that are appropriate to be shared in front of a group. Each partner is invited to share what they feel comfortable sharing, keeping in mind that challenging yourself to step out of your comfort zone can allow God to work in you in a new way. Prayer partners is not only a place to pray for individual circumstances but is also a space to pray about regional, national, and global issues; churches and organizations; or other large-scale issues.

Questions for Group Discussion:

- Has anyone ever had a prayer partner before? If so, what was your experience like?
- How could prayer partners be a practical way of living out Romans 12:2?
- How has receiving prayer from others encouraged, empowered, or impacted you?

Leader Note: Pair members up with one another, and provide them with the following three questions to discuss in pairs.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS IN PAIRS

- What would you like to gain and what would you like to offer from prayer partners?
- What are current areas in your life/faith that you are in need of prayer support?
- Which burdensome systemic regional, national, or global issue would you like to spend time praying about together?

CLOSE IN PRAYER PARTNERS (10 mins)

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Week 3: Building Community

INTRO

Spend some time getting acquainted by doing an ice breaker or get-to-know-you activity.

SILENCE (6 mins)*

Find a comfortable position, and settle in. Allow each of your muscles to relax as you focus on your breathing. Deeply inhale... hold for a moment... and slowly exhale. Continue this rhythm. [Give members a moment to do this.] Let go of the thoughts fighting for your attention. [Give another moment.] *What are you feeling? Where do you sense God?*

As your thoughts wander, bring your attention back to your breath. Breathe in God's presence with a deep inhale, [pause] and slowly exhale any distractions or concerns. [6 minute silence.] Take one last deep breath and allow your eyes to slowly open. Amen.

How was that experience for you? Anything particularly noticeable, difficult, or beneficial?

SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:3-8 "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness."

CONTEXT

Not even God exists in isolation. God is Trinity, three Persons in One, in constant community with Godself. In the same way, God has created each of us as members of one body, the body of Christ. We all have different gifts, different capabilities, and different stories – and that is something to be celebrated. Our unique differences and our deep interconnectedness is intentional; we were designed this way with purpose. Engaging in community allows us to experience the heavenly unity in diversity that God intended for us. Though many churches or Christians have not represented this truth well, each of us will be practicing community here. This will allow us to experience a more holistic representation of God and his design for people.

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SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

As we are each unique members of the body of Christ, today we are going to acknowledge and affirm one another in this. Pull out some pens, pencils, or markers. Grab paper, notecards, or something you can write on.

Take a moment to reflect on each person in your group. How have they positively impacted you or the group? Which spiritual gifts do they exhibit? What strengths, skills, or abilities do they possess? When is a time that their presence brought love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, or self-control to your interaction?

Begin writing a note for each group member affirming at least one thing about who they are and how that adds to the community of your D-Group. These may be shared at the end, or sent to one another at the end of the semester as encouragement.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Re-read Romans 12:3-8. What sticks out to you about this passage?
- What is it like for you to receive affirmation? Is it enjoyable? Uncomfortable?
- Were you comfortable giving affirmations to others in the group?
- How did this practice bring you joy? How did it stretch you?
- In what ways could you practice giving affirmation more regularly? How do you need to grow in receiving affirmation?

Leader Note: Brainstorm ideas together, and make a shared list.

CLOSING PRAYER

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Week 4: Practicing Hospitality

INTRO

Spend some time getting acquainted by doing an ice breaker or get-to-know-you activity.

SILENCE (8 mins)*

Find a comfortable position, and settle in. Allow each of your muscles to relax as you focus on your breathing. Deeply inhale... hold for a moment... and slowly exhale. Continue this rhythm. [Give members a moment to do this.] Let go of the thoughts fighting for your attention. [Give another moment.] *What are you feeling? Where do you sense God?*

As your thoughts wander, bring your attention back to your breath. Breathe in God's presence with a deep inhale, [pause] and slowly exhale any distractions or concerns. [8 minute silence.] Take one last deep breath and allow your eyes to slowly open. Amen.

How was that experience for you? Anything particularly noticeable, difficult, or beneficial?

SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:9-13 "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."

CONTEXT

Hospitality is often associated with good food, a well-prepared home, and those we know and love to be around. But despite hospitality's common portrayals in secular society, Christian hospitality is distinct and has something different to offer. For the Christ-follower, hospitality is about warmly receiving people without a community and integrating them into one. Jesus was a master at this! Following his example, Christian hospitality is an authentic expression of the welcoming love of Jesus to those who need it most — those who our society disregards or overlooks. Christian hospitality is a practical way for us to love our neighbors. We can, then, understand Christian hospitality not as grand gestures or fancy parties but about creating spaces of belonging for the kinds of people that Jesus went out of his way to pursue and restore to community.

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SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Find a comfortable position, and sit in stillness for a moment. Take a few deep breaths and think about the word *hospitality*. Think back to the last time you were warmly welcomed by another person. Maybe you were welcomed into someone's home or invited to a church event. Maybe it was a simple catch-up over coffee or a meal. Who was that with? How did being welcomed into a space of belonging make you feel? Did you experience God in that encounter? If so, how did you identify God's presence? Hold onto those thoughts, feelings, and realizations for the next few moments.

Now take a few more breaths. Think back to the last time that *you* welcomed another person into a space of belonging. What did you do? How did you approach the person you were inviting? How did that experience make you feel? Did you reflect Jesus' hospitable character during this interaction?

Hold onto all of those thoughts, feelings, and realizations. Now, take a moment to breathe and sit in silence. Slowly bring your focus back to this present space. How was this experience of recollection for you?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Re-read Romans 12:9-13. Have you experienced the hospitality that is described in this passage? If so, how did it impact you?
- What is required for Christian hospitality to be extended? Do you have to be in person, or can you extend and receive it virtually?
- Which people in our surrounding APU's campus need hospitality the most right now? Who in your life is in need of hospitality the most right now?
- What are some practical ways for you to extend Christian hospitality in the next few weeks?

CLOSING PRAYER

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Week 5: Doing Justice

INTRO

Spend some time getting acquainted by doing an ice breaker or get-to-know-you activity.

SILENCE (10 mins)*

Find a comfortable position, and settle in. Allow each of your muscles to relax as you focus on your breathing. Deeply inhale... hold for a moment... and slowly exhale. Continue this rhythm. [Give members a moment to do this.] Let go of the thoughts fighting for your attention. [Give another moment.] *What are you feeling? Where do you sense God?*

As your thoughts wander, bring your attention back to your breath. Breathe in God's presence with a deep inhale, [pause] and slowly exhale any distractions or concerns. [10 minute silence.] Take one last deep breath and allow your eyes to slowly open. Amen.

Each week, our time in silence has increased by two minutes. Did you notice the change in duration? Would you consider incorporating silence into your daily rhythm? If so, how so?

SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:14-21 "Bless those who persecute you; bless & do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

CONTEXT

What would it look like if every Christ-follower in the world took this passage seriously? The world would look very different. Poverty, racism, pollution, hunger, and oppression would cease. All people would live justly, thus peace would be a genuine possibility for everyone. Simply put, the goal of justice is to right what is wrong, both individually and structurally. This concept of righting what is wrong comes from God, and God's concern for justice can be found in biblical passages from Genesis to Revelation.

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Embodying God's justice requires that Christ-followers do it God's way – in a manner that is holy. God's justice is so comprehensive and holistic that it could never be fully captured by one person, ideology, or political party. Understanding God's justice requires a reading of the entirety of Scripture, a constant posture of humble prayer, an honest sharing of personal experiences, and a commitment to learning from those who have gone before us. Let's all choose to release our gut reactions and learn how to listen to one another without fear or defensiveness as we talk about practicing biblical justice.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Let's begin with brainstorming. Close your eyes and begin to picture the community you are living in. Imagine driving down the streets of areas you're familiar with, and then in the parts of town you typically avoid. See the schools, the parks, the businesses.

Now, with eyes still closed, think of what biblical justice means to you. What do you think of when you hear this word? Who do you think is in need of justice in your community? Take a moment for God to speak to you about his justice and what that might look like in your context. Open your eyes, and share what came up for you.

As a group, come up with a list of ideas for how to do justice or learn about justice. Is there an organization that serves an underprivileged group near you? Is there a food pantry that needs volunteers or donations? Is there a book you'd like to read to educate yourself on the history of racism in America? Jot down these ideas.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How have you witnessed or experienced injustice?
- What does God's justice look like in Romans 12:14-21?
- What other Scripture passages that reveal God's concern for justice? Come up with a collective list.
- What could doing justice look like on campus, in the community, through your church, etc.?

CLOSING PRAYER

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