

*Spiritual Worship:
Experiencing the Presence in the Midst*

Getting Started

Focus: You have repeatedly been reminded that the experience of your group members is as important as the teaching of lessons to them. Our goal isn't for group members to have heard about Quakerism, but to have experienced the best of it in these sessions. This particular session lends itself well to this. As a leader, make it your goal to not just talk about Friends worship, but come ready to truly worship together, helping your group experience spiritual worship firsthand.

- Introduce this session's topic and invite members to spend some moments together in silence.
- Out of the silence sing a chorus or read some scripture.
- In this atmosphere of silence invite praises and prayer requests, pausing to give thanks or prayer for each as appropriate.
- Conclude these opening moments of worship with handshakes (the traditional conclusion of meetings for worship in the unprogrammed Friends tradition).

Introduction: Spiritual Worship

Focus: While it's true that Friends have a history of worshipping in silence, we should never worship the silence itself. The focus of Friends worship is the real presence of Jesus Christ. Most Indiana Yearly Meeting Friends churches are "programmed," meaning that at least some parts of their worship services are pre-planned and leaders are designated in advance. Even so, most of these same churches include

periods of “open” or “unprogrammed” worship that is marked by a silent waiting upon the leading of the Spirit.

Discussion Questions

- Tell about an experience you have had in a worship service when you especially sensed the presence of Christ. What contributed to this?
- Matthew 18:20 promises that Christ will be present when two or more gather in His name. How is the presence of Christ experienced differently in a group than when one is alone?

Worship in Spirit & Truth

Focus: The scripture from John 4 tells us God is searching for those who will worship in spirit and truth. God isn't searching for those who worship in the finest buildings or those who worship with the best music. The worship God values most is worship that comes from the heart, which is exactly what Friends emphasize. For Friends, communion is not a quarterly or weekly ritual; it is an every-moment experience of the risen Christ that is magnified as we gather together for the purpose of worship.

Discussion Questions

- Which of these three “titles” would best describe a portrait of worship in your church? (1) The Boredom in the Pews, (2) The Program in the Bulletin, or (3) The Presence in the Midst.
- Do ornate facilities and carefully planned church services contribute to the kind of worship God seeks or distract from it?
- Do simple meetinghouses and waiting in silence contribute to the kind of worship God seeks or distract from it?

Led by the Spirit, Not by People

Focus: The book of Acts demonstrates that at times the early church worshiped in somewhat formal settings (at the temple) and just as easily experienced Christ together in more informal settings (from house to house). At times their worship was marked by teaching and singing, and at other times a sense of awe no doubt brought a holy hush over them as they gathered together. This is how Friends seek to worship, in spontaneous response to the Spirit of God that leads us.

Discussion Questions

- Share a memory of a worship service when it was obvious that the plans of the worship leader or pastor were laid aside in favor of the immediate leading of the Holy Spirit.
- Would your church welcome an interruption in its normal worship routine or would this be upsetting?
- How can one tell the difference between the leading of the Spirit and one's own thoughts or ideas?

Conclusion

Since Friends' worship doesn't depend on a person, a plan, or a place, we can't blame unfulfilling worship on anyone but ourselves.

Discussion Questions

- What can I do to enrich my personal worship experience?
- How can I contribute to the meetings for worship in our Friends Church?
- What evidence is there that those who attend our meetings for worship regularly sense the presence of Christ?