SESSION THREE

How Does Worship Shape Us for Life?

Summary

Session three looks at how worship makes a difference in our lives. Reflection question: How are we formed and transformed through worship?

FOR LEADERS

Preparation

• Prepare items needed.
• Choose a song for the sending time.

Items needed

• Worship table
• Congregational photos such as a photo directory and photos of church activities
• Candle and matches
• Bible

Gathering: Breathing In

Place the symbols of worship on a worship table. Add a candle to the table and light it as you begin the session. Invite people to breathe in deeply and then exhale. Spend a moment in silence, becoming aware of God’s presence within and all around.

Read, or invite someone ahead of time to read, Romans 12:1-2:

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 spiritual worship. 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.

Pray:

Spirit of God, we pray for your grace and blessing during our time together. Change our hearts and our minds so that we can grow closer to you. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.
Entering

Tia attended her first youth convention this summer. It was an amazing week in which she was especially moved by the worship. Tia was drawn to the inviting visuals, powerful preaching, good music, and rituals of healing that spoke directly to her and motivated her to go out and serve the world. After the last worship service she told her youth sponsor, “I’ll never be the same.”

People come to worship for many reasons—to meet friends, to offer praise and thanksgiving to God, to cope when going through hard times, and to be encouraged in their walk with Jesus. Worship makes a difference in their lives. How does worship make a difference in your life?

Exploring

Worship is what empowers followers of Jesus to live faithfully in the world. In worship our minds take in wisdom, our hearts are moved, and our whole beings are called to live out the gospel.

When Mennonites worship together, we are formed as the people of God and transformed to live as committed disciples (Ephesians 4:13, 15). We do not leave a worship service exactly the same as when we entered. The prayers, preaching, and music all have the power to change us.

This transformation happens because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Not even the preacher or the worship leader knows exactly how the congregation will be moved. The Holy Spirit guides us and is always changing us by leading us into new ways of thinking and behaving (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:14).

Mennonites believe that worship and life are intimately connected. We cannot separate what happens in one area of life from what happens in another. The welcoming hospitality we offer in worship or the prayerful attention we give to God’s voice carry over to all of life. This means that worshipping God together changes our character, our worldview, our ethics, and our behaviors because worship affects our lives.

Think of it this way: you go the park one afternoon with a child to let the child burn off some energy. As you walk, both of you start noticing the changing color of the leaves, squirrels scampering up trees, and neighbors mowing grass. Together you slow down and fully take in the surrounding neighborhood. The experience may still be about letting the child run and play, but along the way your own outlook and experience are shaped as well. The same thing happens in worship: we show up to honor God, but honoring God changes us and shapes how we live.

The actions in which we typically engage in Anabaptist-Mennonite worship form and transform our lives in many ways.

• When we gather we come together as a community and are reminded of our connectedness to each other and our reliance on Christ, who unites us.

• In acts of praising and adoring we acknowledge that we are deeply and gratefully dependent upon God, who created us.

• In confessing and reconciling we bring to worship our own messy lives, confessing our sin and brokenness and receiving God’s forgiveness, healing, and grace. We receive assurance that we are God’s beloved children. We are invited to extend forgiveness and reconciliation to a broken world.

• As we hear God’s Word proclaimed, we are reminded of God’s gracious acts and God’s desire to create new life.
• When we affirm our faith we renew our commitment to, and trust in, God. We receive baptism and the Lord’s Supper as signs that we follow the way of Christ.

• In offering tithes and offerings to God, we give generously in response to God’s love for us. We also offer and receive hospitality when we welcome newcomers, give and receive the peace of Christ, and fellowship with each other.

• We are called not just to pray for our own needs but also for the needs of others. When we pray we release our joys and concerns into God’s hands, trusting that God cares and is at work in our lives and in our world.

• In worship we give witness to the transformation God has brought about in our lives. This practice continues in daily life as the church engages in acts of peacemaking, service, and sharing the good news of God’s reconciliation.

• As worship ends, we are sent into the world, knowing that God is working in our lives and in the world to bring healing and hope.

**Conversing**

*Separating life and faith*

At one time or another we may have thought we could keep our faith separate from other parts of our lives. This week’s discussion shows us that such separation is impossible. Worship and life are always intimately connected.

• How might you have tried to keep your faith and life separate from one another? Why? How did that work?

• How has worship changed you?

• In what ways has Anabaptist-Mennonite worship shaped your life differently than if you were part of another faith tradition?

*Being formed and transformed*

In worship and in life God forms and transforms us. The act of forming is continuous and ongoing. God is always at work forming us as Christians. Transforming happens in those sudden moments that catch us off guard, when things fit together in a new way.

• Share a personal story about how worship in your congregation has affected your life. How is your understanding of your Christian life different as a result?

• How does your congregation form the faith of children, youth, and adults through worship? How does the weekly worship service call people to live?

• Describe a time in a worship service that was transforming. What caught you off guard or fit together in a new way in that worship service? Why was that service so powerful?

*Other ways of worshipping*

This session lists some typical actions that take place in Anabaptist-Mennonite worship. But this is only a partial list of how a congregation and its members are engaged in worship.

• How do the typical actions of worship in your congregation compare with the list in this study guide? What might be different?

• How have these actions changed over the years? Are there actions your congregation no longer includes? What new actions might be included? How have these changes affected the formation and transformation of worshippers in your congregation?
CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR CHILDREN

- One thing that happens in worship is prayer. We pray out loud to God. We also pray silently. We say thank-you to God for good things in our lives and ask for God’s help in times of trouble. When you talk to God, what do you say? What do you like to talk to God about?
- Tell about something special that happened in your church’s worship.

FOR LEADERS

Sending: Breathing Out

Singing (choose one):

- HWB 26 Holy Spirit, come with power, v.3
- HWB 487 Teach me, O Lord, vv.1-2
- SJ 28 We worship God the Rock
- SJ 35 O Breath of Life
- CCLI 4705176 From the inside out
- CCLI 2296522 The heart of worship

Blessing:

Carry your worship with you into the world. And may your love for God and one another abound more and more, both in understanding and in wealth of experience, so that you may learn to value the things that really matter, up to the very day of Christ. Amen.—Adapted from Philippians 1: 9-10

Bibliography

