

A Place Where People Matter!

A Guide to ...

Leading Worship In Small Groups

**Practical steps
to cultivating a
worshipping
small group**

Includes helpful resources for
those seeking further development
in leading worship for small groups

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Oasis Christian Centre : Small Group Worship

Worshipping in small groups can't be beaten for that intimate, precious, raw and community vibe. If it is done well, there's something that happens when a small group of people come together in someone's front room and sing out to God. It feels so uncomplicated, so free from distractions and if we can lead people to that 'secret place of praise' in a small group setting it can be so beautiful.

Leading small groups in worship has its own set of unique challenges; ironically, leading a small group can be much harder than leading a large group of people. As Andy Park states 'with a large group, there is built-in momentum because of the number of people worshipping together, but if you're leading a small group of eight people, sometimes it can be hard to get the engine running.'

With a small group there are many things to consider, sometimes people will be too afraid to sing out, some will love to sing out but those around them really wish they wouldn't as their tone deaf approach is more of a distraction. Sometimes there will be visitors to the group and sometimes people just are happy to listen and you can feel like the Lone Ranger.

Not to paint a bleak picture, but being honest leading a small group in worship can be a big challenge that becomes a chore. It can be a real challenge for the worship leader and yet in my experience it is also one of the most rewarding places and a great way to develop the skill of leading people in worship.

Here are some practical suggestions for those stepping out and taking on the challenge to serve small groups with the precious gift of leading them in worship.

Choose accessible, easy-to-sing songs

One temptation in small groups is to mimic the feel of the Sunday service, small groups are not designed to mimic Sunday but instead work with Sunday. Small groups are unique and for that reason something very unique can come out of the worship times.

Instead of choosing those songs that work well in a service, instead work with what you are comfortable with. Don't use the small group to try the newest trendy songs. Choose songs that people know well, that they will be confident to sing out loud.

One of the biggest challenges in small group worship is that you can feel so vulnerable. For both the leader and those involved, all the security blankets are removed and we are fully exposed.

As the leader it is important to sing out confidently, but not too loud that it becomes a distraction, and with a careful song selection people will slowly learn to trust the group and raise a voice.

Try to avoid songs that use a male and female repeat lines, on the whole small groups can't handle that as there are too few confident singers to carry such songs.

Songs can become easier to sing if the key of the song is changed, for example

'Beautiful One (Wonderful so wonderful)' is in the key of 'G' and in a setting with lots of people expressing their passionate devotion to God, such a song will work. However in a small group people may struggle to sing such high songs so lowering the key to 'E' would allow more accessibility.

Tempo is another thing that can transform a song. A song like 'Lord you are good', works well in a larger setting yet slowing the chorus right down and having a small group declare 'Lord You are good and Your mercy endureth forever' has such power.

It is worth noting that reminding the small group that their voices go far beyond the four walls that surround them and that they join with thousands across heaven and earth declaring God's love can be an encouragement to sing out.

Don't be afraid to use sections of songs, you may not be confident to include a whole song because you are uncertain of the melody, select a section of the song, maybe a chorus or bridge and use that. A good example of this is 'Light of the world', the bridge declares 'I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross,' this can be a time of confession through song and works well without the requiring the rest of the song.

Be assertive

Sing out and sing up, if you are tentative people will sing tentatively along with you. It takes a lot more volume than you may think to lead a small group, as people try to find confidence to sing if they can find the pitch from someone and follow them then they will be more willing to sing out.

Try getting people to stand together, as people stand their diaphragms open up and after a long day at work sitting on a comfy seat can be just too tempting to sleep so by standing it may help focus the group and boost them towards expressiveness.

Help I don't play an instrument!

Firstly don't be put off the idea of leading worship if you don't play an instrument or you aren't confident in your ability. Yes, playing an instrument will help as it gives freedom to move as you feel the Spirit lead, but it is not the be all and end all. If you do play an instrument but your confidence is lacking then practice alone, build your confidence and maybe get some lessons, another option is to find some courses that can be self-taught through an instrument book and accompanying CD.

If you are leading a group and there people in that group that do play an instrument then you could invite them to be involved and help you lead, if no one in your group can help then there are CDs available with just music on, even using a CD with the tracks on that you feel are appropriate is fine. All you need to think of when using CDs is try not to use lots of different tracks from different CDs, it can be very distracting if someone is changing CDs and flicking through tracks as people are trying to focus.

Don't be afraid of silence, leaving room to embrace the intimacy small groups offer is all part of the make-up of the environment and silence is a great tool to allow people to sit and reflect.

To create more momentum shakers and hand drums can add a lot of energy. Many people who have a good sense of rhythm can learn to play percussion instruments very quickly and it adds another dimension.

Another way to lead worship without instruments is using visual aids, like DVDs, it can be inspiring to watch a DVD of worship. For example these can include Hillsong DVDs of their worship times and also iworship have created DVDs of well known worship songs with the words appearing to scenes of creation and other inspiring visuals.

Whatever you do, don't feel limited if you are not musical, after all God does not limit the worship of His people to song, it is a tool He uses but not the only tool. Instead focus on what you can do and try to engage other sense like touch or sight; this will encourage those who struggle with singing and open their eyes to other forms of worship.

Be patient

Give people time. Sitting in a small circle facing each other is threatening, especially if people are just getting acquainted. Freedom in worship is related to the freedom and security of the personal relationships within the group. As people grow and find openness and mutual trust they become more open and vulnerable to God in worship. Give them time and lead by example, if you show that you are willing to trust them with a personal experience or struggle then they will begin to trust and it opens up freedom in worship.

You are there to Serve

It can become very easy to judge when a small group come together and it is hard to 'get them going'. At these times remember that you are there to serve them. If people are not showing outward responses or even singing don't judge them, instead just gently encourage them. You are there to give a gift to God, not to be encouraged in your gifting. Leading worship in a small group takes a lot of perseverance and you don't always get immediate payoff. If you decide to worship even if it feels like no one else is there with you then you are giving freely of yourself and that is obedience, and your obedience to God's calling means you are a success.

Above all else...

Allow God to do what He wants to do. God is bigger than abilities, giftings and resources. Enjoy the process of leading worship and your passion will be infectious.

Small groups are there to encourage and if people feel they are coming each week to be lectured and reminded of their inabilities then they will simply stop coming.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:26 'when you come together, everyone has a hymn, or word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.'

In this context there is a greater freedom for people to contribute. A small group is a much safer place to explore spontaneity and if trust is built and you encourage people to start a song if they feel it is appropriate, or they feel they want to pray or read from the scriptures this will allow people to step out more.

Remember this, God wants to meet with His people, He longs to be intimate with them and small groups are a great way to cultivate this intimacy. Through vulnerability God is able to draw us close to Himself. For this reason it is the best place to start. There is no finer training ground. So be encouraged as you step out, He will not allow you to stumble and fall instead He will guide and protect you as you seek to serve Him and His people.

Resources

Online articles

- http://www.intervarsity.org/slj/wi91/wi91_cs_sg_worship.htm
- <http://www.passionforyourname.com/0204practical.htm>
- <http://smallgroups.com>

CDs/DVDs

- Small Group Worship - Songs Of Fellowship: Small Group Worship CD
- Hillsong DVDs
- Integrity's iworship DVDs

All available at oasischristiancentre.org.uk shop

Books

- The Resource for Small Group Worship 6 Volumes by Chris Bowater
- 50 Small Group Worship Ideas by Stuart Townend with Morgan Lewis
- Creative worship ideas for small groups by Yvonne Morey

All available at oasischristiancentre.org.uk shop

Websites

- <http://worshipcentral.org.uk>
- <http://www.worshiptogether.com>
- <http://www.insideworship.com>
- <http://www.worship.com>
- <http://www.oasischristiancentre.org.uk>

Free Chord charts

- <http://www.christianguitar.org>

For more information and help on leading worship in small groups and other worship relate queries, please contact us:

Oasis Christian Centre | 4 Plymouth Road | Redditch | B97 4QB
e: worship@oasischristiancentre.org.uk | t: +44 (0)1527 585926