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## **Train & Multiply™**

Project WorldReach (T&M™ ministry operation)  
Dr. George Patterson (Originating Author)  
SEAN International



Contact: **Project WorldReach PWR™**

474 - 800 - 15355 - 24th Ave  
Surrey BC, Canada  
V4A 2H9

E-mail: [pwr@trainandmultiply.com](mailto:pwr@trainandmultiply.com)

Website: <http://www.trainandmultiply.com>

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# **The House Church**



**Pastoral Leader Training Booklet**

# **12**

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The house church has existed since the days of the Apostles. Paul sent greetings to the church that met in Priscilla and Aquilla's house. In our days of large buildings and vast cathedrals, there is still a great need for churches that meet in homes. In many areas there is exciting church growth where house churches reproduce themselves in daughter and granddaughter churches.

- new churches are multiplying and need a style of worship that their inexperienced leaders can handle and pass onto others.

- Read Ephesians 4:7-16.
- Write out your plans to help the members of your church or group to participate in some part of the worship service and in other ministries.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

responsibility or help lead the services. Each member of the body receives spiritual gifts from God for some ministry, and should exercise them. (Romans 12:4-16)

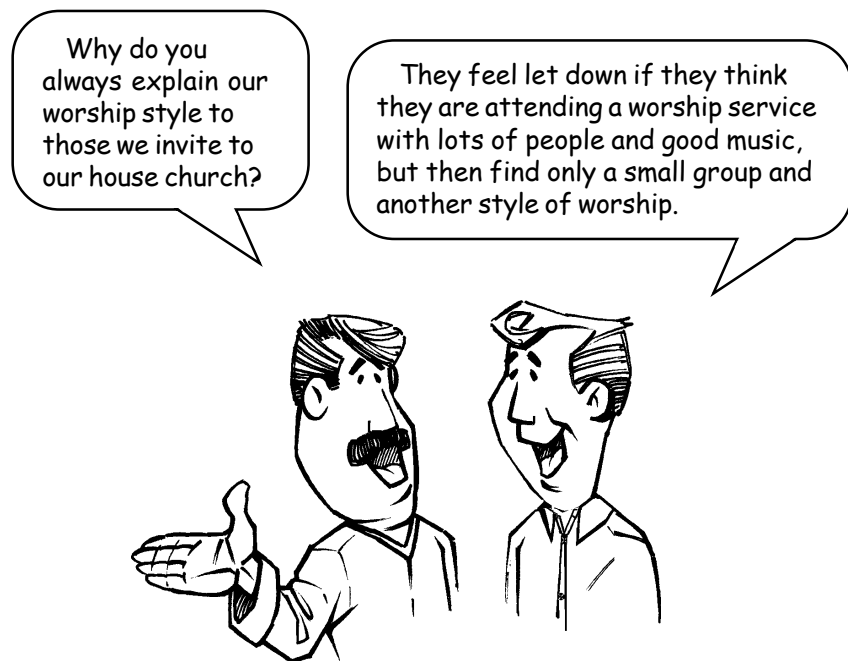
- ☐ When the members see growth in numbers, they stop taking personal responsibility, become benchwarmers, and leave everything to the pastors and elders. We must help all members to grow in their ministries. This way new leaders emerge quickly who enable the church to reproduce daughter churches.
- ☐ Too little attention is given to the children and young people. The House Church must show love to them and help them to participate in the vital aspects of worship. It may be wise to teach the children in another room during the teaching time.
- ☐ Lack of discipling. Each person needs a discipler, including the children. This ministry can be delegated to mature people with a gift for discipling. For example, the main leader discipless his assistants and other mature members of the group, who then disciple others. The aim is to help all the members, young and old, to obey the Lord, grow and develop their own ministries.

- the authorities prohibit public worship meetings. (Half of the world's people live in such places. For this reason, missionaries should have prior experience in planting and developing house churches.)
- the church is very new and/or too small for a chapel.
- there is no building or chapel available.
- building lots or construction are too expensive.
- existing churches are not reaching the people.
- the people feel the need to worship in closer fellowship in homes, as the early church did. (Acts 5:42, Acts 20:20, Romans 16:5)

A typical error in starting worship services in a new House Church is to use the same methods as used in a large church. Worship as practiced in many large churches needs well-trained musicians, experienced leaders, and a large group of people. But most new or small churches lack these things.

## Lesson 1

If your church is small, do not imitate the style of worship of larger churches!



When one enters a church building, one knows that it is dedicated to worship. But in a private home (a house church), one hears the children playing in the bedroom, sees a dog scratching in a corner, and smells the food in the kitchen. Hardly a place, some are tempted to think, for serious worship!

- ☐ Many house churches dry on the vine because they imitate the worship style of the mother church. It may have been a great blessing there, but does not fit the new, tiny church. We adapt the style of worship to small groups with inexperienced leaders.
- ☐ Lack of trained leaders. Each house church leader should always be preparing two or three assistant leaders, giving them more and more responsibility until they can shepherd a house church themselves. Then they form their own group or continue as co-pastors (elders) of the first church.
- ☐ The leaders only deal with Christians' needs, and do not mobilize the members for ministry to others. Some house churches become ingrown and fail to grow and reproduce, because they just meet each other's needs and do not reach out to serve the community around them in a positive, practical way, using their spiritual gifts. (Ephesians 4:11-15) Organize the congregation to learn to minister to unsaved people and to take serious social responsibility in the neighborhood.
- ☐ The pastor controls everything. Many house churches are strangled because a leader does not help others to take

authorities, a few Christians should visit sister churches with news and words of encouragement. You might circulate an information bulletin. The important thing is to form a network of mutually supportive house churches.

- ☐ The church always meets in the leader's house. It is usually better not to meet in the home of the main leader. This avoids criticisms that he "owns" the church. Also, members are more hesitant to give their opinions when the church is meeting in the home of the leader.
- ☐ The church grows too large for the house. In a normal sized house, when the regular attendees don't fit into the room, they have the option of moving to a larger hall and becoming a regular church or divide into two, forming a new house group. For the latter, you should already be preparing assistants who will later form their own groups.
- ☐ Interruptions during the worship time. Take turns to be in charge of caring for the tiny ones and to deal with anyone who comes to the door.

## Lesson 2

We must take certain steps to make sure we spend quality time together with our Lord.

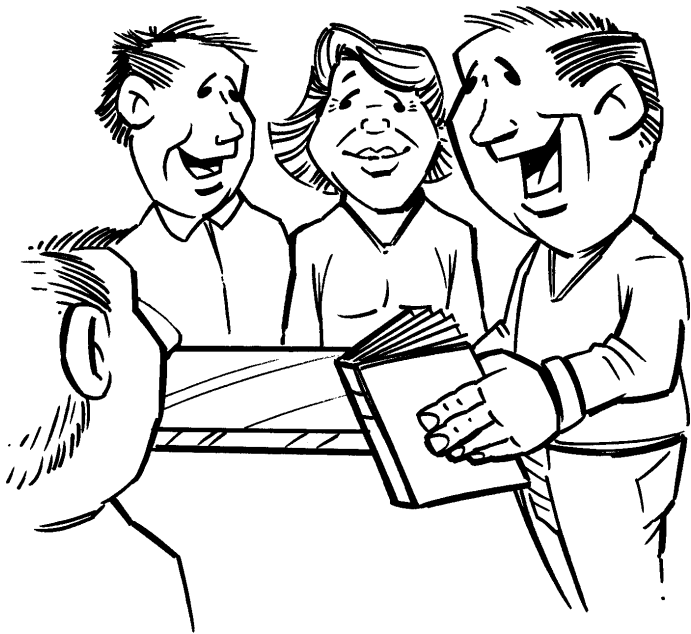
This Pastoral Training Booklet will give useful advice to help a small group to experience edifying worship. It will also aid a new leader to lead worship in a house.



# THE PLACE OF WORSHIP IN A HOUSE CHURCH

How do we convert a room in a private home into a house of prayer, for the time of worship?

There is no fixed rule about how a room should look in order to have meaningful worship. It depends on local customs. Some prefer to sit in a semi-circle, arranging chairs in the form of a horseshoe. Some prefer simplicity; others like a more 'liturgical' atmosphere.



## Causes of failure of house churches

Mark any errors that you need to correct in your group:

- ☐ The hostess feels obliged to make too many preparations. To avoid this worry, do not serve meals (except for special occasions).
- ☐ People with aims outside of the purpose of the church promote their own interest. Do not allow anyone to do business or talk politics at the meetings.
- ☐ The church stops evangelizing when it starts public worship services. Keep seeking the lost sheep!
- ☐ The leader's wife doesn't support his ministry. This creates tension in the home and in the church.
- ☐ Lack of contact with other churches. Small house churches must meet from time to time with other house churches for a large and joyful celebration. Where this is prohibited by the

9. Do you recall the eight important features of worship? Try to write them by memory, before checking the answer.

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Answer:

- A definite BEGINNING and END
- CONFESSION OF SINS & ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS
- PRAISE
- TESTIMONIES
- PRAYER
- OFFERINGS
- Study and apply GOD'S WORD
- Celebrate the LORD'S SUPPER (if not weekly, at regular intervals)

Which of these do you need to develop more?

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If your group has no set way in which they worship the Lord, consider the following aspects:

- Choose a quiet room, as free of interruptions as possible.
- Place the chairs in a circle.
- In the center, place a table covered with a clean white cloth for the bread and wine for the Lord's Supper.
- Some find it useful to hang a special banner, cross or written notice on the wall just before beginning, to signal that the formal worship time is in progress.

Which is the best place for your group to meet?

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Briefly describe how you will prepare the room.

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# EIGHT FEATURES OF WORSHIP IN A HOUSE CHURCH

Simplicity of surroundings and small numbers is not an excuse for unprepared, sloppy worship. On the contrary, since the environment can lend itself to distractions, it is really important that the House Church leader prepares the worship service well, so that all present will spend a meaningful time together, and with the Lord.



Help children and young people to participate. A boring service, from their perspective, can turn them away from church.

Use the following eight features of worship, in the order that best fits your group. They are not an 'order' of worship but a list of things worship normally includes (we include an order of worship farther on in this study).

6. "Take, eat. This is my Body" is part of:

- ☐ discipling and fellowship.
- ☐ praise.
- ☐ prayer.
- ☐ Lord's Supper.

7. We dedicate money to God in the:

- ☐ confession.
- ☐ praise.
- ☐ offerings.
- ☐ discipling and fellowship.

8. Before or after the service there is a time for:

- ☐ confession.
- ☐ Lord's Supper.
- ☐ Word.
- ☐ discipling and fellowship.

Answers:

1 = opening; 2 = praise; 3 = example of how to pray;  
4 = confession; 5 = teaching and discussing the Word;  
6 = Lord's Supper; 7 = offerings; 8 = discipling and fellowship.



3. “Our Father, who art in Heaven...” relates more to:

- ☐ discipling and fellowship.
- ☐ praise.
- ☐ an example of how we should pray.
- ☐ Word.
- ☐ Lord’s Supper.

4. I acknowledge my rebellion (Psalm 51) involves mostly:

- ☐ opening.
- ☐ confession.
- ☐ Word.
- ☐ Lord’s Supper.

5. Explaining a Bible passage is linked more to what part of worship?

- ☐ opening.
- ☐ confession.
- ☐ teaching and applying the word.
- ☐ Lord’s Supper.
- ☐ offering.

## Features of Worship:

- Have a definite BEGINNING and END,
- CONFESSION OF SINS and ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS (normally this comes before celebrating the Lord’s Supper),
- PRAISE,
- TESTIMONIES,
- PRAYER,
- OFFERINGS,
- Study and apply GOD’S WORD,
- Celebrate the LORD’S SUPPER (if not weekly, at regular intervals).

Note: It is also important to plan times for DISCIPLING and FELLOWSHIP.

# LET THE BEGINNING AND END BE EVIDENT

Since the surroundings are informal, it is important that the beginning and closing of the group worship in a house church be very definite.

## Example of an opening: the beginning

- All stand.
- The leader calls the people to worship with verses from the Psalms (or another passage that directs our attention toward God).
- The leader or someone he appoints, asks the Almighty to make His presence felt, and brings the people to sense His presence in the spirit of Habakuk 2:20, “The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.”

This opening is brief but solemn, focused on God in serious worship. It must be evident that we are entering as a group into God’s holy presence, so that all are freed from distractions and turn their thoughts to the Lord.

# SUMMARY TEST

This exercise helps you bear in mind the essential parts of worship and their purpose. Mark the correct answer.

1. Enter His gates with singing, and into His temple with songs of praise (Psalm 100:4) is normally more suitable for the:
  - ☐ opening.
  - ☐ prayer.
  - ☐ Word.
  - ☐ Lord’s Supper.
2. I will bless the Lord with all my soul! (Psalm 103) deals more with:
  - ☐ discipling and fellowship.
  - ☐ praise.
  - ☐ prayer.
  - ☐ Word.
  - ☐ Lord’s Supper.

## (Afterwards) DISCIPLING AND FELLOWSHIP

- Reports and plans of members' ministries.

Finish at a time suitable for everyone, rearrange the room and thank the hosts.

Notes:

[illegible]

**Example of a closing: the end**

- All stand.
- Sing a joyful hymn.
- The leader asks for God's blessing on the group with a brief closing prayer.
- All greet each other and have a time of fellowship.
- Take the banner or cross, if used, from the wall.

Notes:

[illegible]

## Some opening verses (to call to worship):

Genesis 28:16,17	Deuteronomy 6:4-5
Psalms 27:4	Psalms 28:6-7
Psalms 43:3-4	Psalms 66:1-2
Psalms 100:1-2	Psalms 115:1
Psalms 118:24	Psalms 122:1
Psalms 136:1	Psalms 147:1-2
Psalms 150:1-2	Isaiah 6:3
Lamentations 3:25-26	Lamentations 3:40-41
Habakkuk 2:20	Matthew 11:28
Revelation 3:20	Revelation 4:11
Revelation 15:4	

## Some opening verses for special occasions:

### ADVENT (4 weeks before Christmas)

Isaiah 9:6	Isaiah 40:1-2
Isaiah 40:3-4	Isaiah 40:5
Isaiah 52:7-8	Isaiah 60:1-2
Zechariah 2:10	Luke 2:10-11

## PRAYER

- Prayers for those present, the nation, the Church, the sick, world evangelization, etc. (kneeling or standing).

## OFFERINGS

- Receive offerings and tithes.
- Prayer dedicating the offerings and tithes to God.

## THE WORD OF GOD

- Ask for God's help to understand and apply His Word.
- Bible readings on the theme of the day: discussion, exhortation, and meditation on the text.
- Hymn of commitment, relating to the theme of the day (standing).

## CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

- Consecration of the bread and wine.
- Take the bread and wine.
- Hymn of thanksgiving or joyful praise.
- Closing prayer (brief).

OPENING (Normally standing. If meeting in a home for the first time, ask God's blessing on it and to make His presence known.)

- Opening verse (call to worship).
- Opening prayer to invoke God's presence.
- Hymn(s) of praise.

#### CONFESSION, ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

- Prayer of confession (many churches prefer a posture that shows contrition, such as kneeling).
- Assurance of forgiveness of sins (thank God for His infinite grace, His gift of forgiveness and eternal salvation in Jesus).

#### PRAISE

- Hymns and Bible readings of praise (standing).
- Prayers, spontaneous testimonies of praise.

#### PUBLIC TESTIMONY

- Say together the Apostles' Creed, or another similar statement of faith (standing).
- Give spontaneous testimonies of what God has been doing in one's life or family.

#### LENT (the 46 days before Easter)

Psalm 16:10-11	Zechariah 12:10
Luke 24:45-46	Ephesians 2:6-7
Hebrews 4:14	Hebrews 4:15-16
Hebrews 10:19-22	

#### PALM SUNDAY (the Sunday before Easter)

Zechariah 9:9  
Psalm 24:7  
Psalm 118:26

#### GOOD FRIDAY

Isaiah 53:5  
Isaiah 53:6  
Isaiah 53:7

#### RESURRECTION SUNDAY (Easter)

Matthew 28:5-6	Acts 13:32-33
1 Corinthians 15:20	1 Peter 1:3

## PENTECOST (7th Sunday after Easter)

Joel 2:28-29

John 4:13-15

John 4:23-24

## TRINITY SUNDAY (the Sunday after Pentecost)

Matthew 28:18-20

Revelation 4:8

Romans 8:15-16

## BIBLE SUNDAY (last Sunday in September)

Psalms 119:9-10

Psalms 119:11-12

Psalms 119:18

Psalms 119:105

## CLOSING (Blessings):

Numbers 6:23-26

Romans 15:33

Romans 16:20

2 Corinthians 13:14

1 Timothy 1:2

Hebrews 13:20-21

Look for persons who are shy, or feel left out, and introduce them to others who will talk with them.

Ask visitors to tell about themselves, their family, their job, their reasons for coming to church and their plans. Listen to them.

## SUGGESTION: AN ORDER OF WORSHIP FOR HOUSE CHURCHES

This example is recommended if you do not already have an order of service that is adequate for your house church. It is good to vary the order and be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

These are merely suggestions. Adapt everything, such as postures (standing, kneeling, etc.) to your own situation.

## BEFORE BEGINNING

- Receive the visitors and make them feel welcome.
- Get acquainted with everyone there and share family news.
- Pay special attention to each child.

Disciplers should meet regularly with their disciples to monitor their progress as they obey Jesus' commands and participate in ministry.

Who might serve as disciplers in your group? Write their names and who they might disciple:

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## Fellowship

This friendship time is to talk freely, before or after the formal part of the worship service. Give time to get to know each other, share family news, get acquainted with the visitors and make the children feel included.

Do not feel that you always have to plan something special for the people to have good fellowship. You should have well-planned social events (meals or activities) once in a while. But do not let these replace simply getting together each week to talk about how things are going.

## CONFESSIONS OF SINS AND ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Even Christians who are saved for all eternity still commit sins and should confess them as God commands us in 1 John 1:8-10, to restore untarnished fellowship with Him in preparation for Communion.

### Examples of ways to confess our sins

- Silent prayer of confession.  
Historically, most pastors lead their people to confess in general terms that they have done things that are wrong and hurt others, including God. Also, that they have left things undone that they should have done.
- Scripture Reading on confession.  
(such as Psalm 51, 1 John 1:5 through 1 John 2:2, or Isaiah 53:4-11)
- Hymns of confession and assurance of forgiveness, emphasizing God's grace.

- Prayers of general confession lead by the leader, such as:

*“Almighty God, our HEAVENLY Father, we have sinned against you and against our fellow men, in thought and word and deed, in the evil we have done and in the good we have not done, through ignorance, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry, and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past; and grant that we may serve you in newness of life, to the glory of your name. Amen.”*

Worship without confession is incomplete. Some pastors, being sheltered from the world, fail to realize that most of their flock have been with ungodly people during the week, subject to temptations and failures that pastors seldom face. Especially in new churches, many feel sharply the pangs of conscience. They need to confess their failures and hear loving words of assurance of God’s grace and forgiveness.

### **Assure the repentant of their forgiveness by:**

- singing a hymn about God’s forgiveness, or

## **DISCIPLESHIP AND FELLOWSHIP**

### **Discipling**

Plan time for discipling. It may be before, after or during the formal worship time, or during the week in homes.

As new believers discover the depths of the Christian faith they need help to apply the Word to their lives, and to begin ministry for the Lord Jesus.

You can assign each new believer to a “discipler” who personally helps the new convert begin to obey the basic commands of Jesus: be baptized, love people in a practical way (forgiving, obeying, helping and caring, etc.), participate in the Lord’s Supper, give, pray daily and witness for Christ. He also helps him to discover and to put his spiritual gifts in practice.

Discipling is loving, sacrificial obedience to Christ: The disciplers help other members of the group to obey God’s Word.



To bless the cup, give thanks to God that the Lord Jesus shed His blood of the New Covenant for our sins. Then quote Jesus' words, *"This is my Blood..."*

### **We can vary the readings to consecrate the elements:**

- Matthew 26:26 for the bread, 26: 27-28 for the wine.
- Luke 22:19 for the bread, 22:20 for the wine.
- Mark 14:22 for the bread, 14:23-24 for the wine.
- 1 Corinthians 11:23-24 for the bread, 11:25 for the wine.

Churches have different customs about the Lord's Supper. Although the Apostles used "wine," today some prefer grape juice or another nonalcoholic beverage that is available in the area.

- thanking God in prayer for His mercy, or
- reading Scripture.

For example:

Isaiah 1:18

Isaiah 6:6-7

Acts 13:38-39

Ephesians 1:3-14

Ephesians 4:32

Hebrews 6:12

Hebrews 9:12-14

## **HELP ALL TO PRAISE GOD FREELY**

During this time of praise we need to forget about ourselves, our own needs and the people around us. We think only of God, praising Him for Who He is and what He has done. Let the people participate spontaneously. Be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and do everything "decently and in order." (1 Corinthians 14:40)

For more help with worship songs, see the Pastoral Training Booklet 31 "Sing to the Lord."

## TESTIMONIES

An important part of group worship is to declare our faith in God and share testimonies of what He has done in our midst. We can do this in several ways:

- by singing a hymn that declares our faith,
- inviting members to share what God has done in their lives during the week,
- saying together one of the church creeds, such as the:

### APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth,  
And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, Who was conceived of  
the Holy Ghost, Born of the virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius  
Pilate, Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the  
third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven,  
And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From there He

## CELEBRATE THE LORD'S SUPPER

Throughout the history of the Church, the Lord's Supper has been at the heart of Christian worship.

Some new house churches fail to let the Holy Spirit use the deep mystery and drama of the Lord's Supper to move the people into serious, dignified worship. The Lord's Supper brings authenticity to house worship.

Seek to obey this important command of the Lord as soon as you can in accordance to the custom of your church or denomination.

The church may be new and have few people. Celebrating the Lord's Supper helps them know that they belong to Christ's body, and are a real church with serious worship.

To bless the bread, give thanks to God for Christ's sacrifice for us. Then quote Jesus' words: "*This is my Body...*"

## THE COURT THAT ACCUSED THE LORD JESUS

Mark 14:43-72

## THE CRUCIFIXION

Mark 15

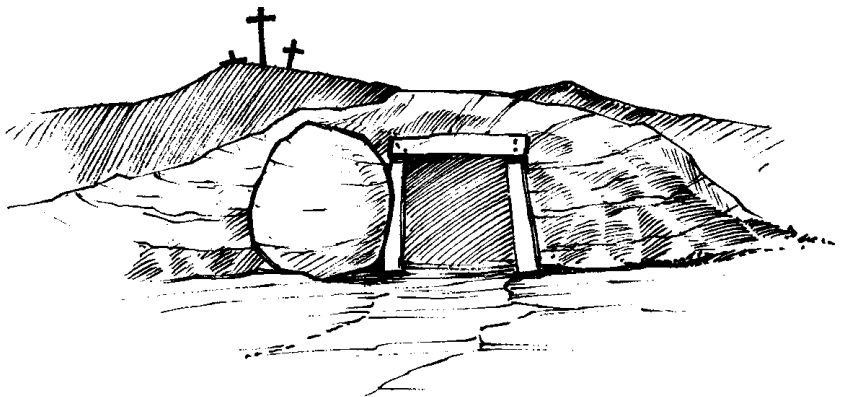
## THE RESURRECTION

Luke 24

## THE ASCENSION

John 14

Acts 1:1-11



shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Universal Church; the communion of Saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

## PRAYER

Much of what we do in a worship service is prayer, whether it be spoken, thought or sung. Prayers form part of the opening, the praise time, confession of sin, the Lord's Supper and the closing benediction.

There should also be a time set apart especially for prayers of intercession, when the people pray for each other and for the Lord's work. In a small group, help all to pray, including the children. Some may prefer to pray in silence. Let them.

For small groups, pray for everyone present. Do not take a long time over prayer requests. House church worship loses its purpose if it becomes a session for long medical reports or complaints.

## OFFERINGS

Giving is part of our worship of God.

If it is awkward to pass an offering plate in a small group, place an offering box by the entrance, to deposit tithes and offerings when people enter or leave.

For help on tithing and budgets, see the Pastoral Training Booklet 3 “Cheerful Giver.”

It is best to start giving tithes and offerings from the very beginning in a new house church. If the people are not giving, they are disobeying a basic command of Christ. Their worship and discipleship are incomplete.

## STUDY AND APPLY GOD’S WORD

All aspects of the worship service are based on the Word of God, for meditation and teaching, also to call the people to worship, to praise God, to assure of forgiveness and to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

### OLD TESTAMENT LAW

Exodus 19:16, 20:20

Romans 7:1-6

Romans 8:1-4

### OUR HIGH PRIEST

Leviticus 8:12-13, 9:8-15, 9:22-24

Leviticus 10:1-7, 16:1-3, 16:15-19

Hebrews 9:11-14

### THE BRONZE SERPENT

Numbers 21:4-9

John 3:1-16

### REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS FOR CHRISTIANS

1 Corinthians 3:11-15

Revelation 7:9-17

(For an Old Testament example of Christ’s judgment seat, see Numbers 31:1-12 31:21-24.)

## GOD TESTS ABRAHAM

Genesis 22:1-18

Matthew 4:1-11

1 Peter 1:6-9

## JESUS' BRIDE THE CHURCH

Ephesians 5:22-33

Revelation 21:1-4

## GOD'S ETERNAL BEING

Exodus 3:1-17

John 8:48-59

John 11:21-27

## SALVATION

Exodus 11:1, 12:1-8, 13:21-24, 13:29-33

Exodus 14:5-6, 19-27, 15:1-5

John 1:35-36

In a small group, it is unwise to preach from a pulpit using sermon oratory. It is better to reflect on God's Word in a way which enables everyone to participate, such as telling Bible stories, asking questions and giving brief exhortations.

Read a passage; then ask questions. The group can read all together, or alternate verses. If some cannot read, they can repeat each phrase after the reader.

Ask questions that help the people to understand the key truths. Use simple questions for the children. Let everyone participate in the discussion (but do not force shy people or newcomers to talk before they are ready). Help all to make a plan to apply God's Word to their lives.

## **A simple method for group Bible study**

Explain the theme of the passage, read it, and ask the following questions to help understand and obey God's Word.

- “What does the passage say?”

Before the meeting, mark the verses that deal with the most important aspects of the theme.

If necessary, say, “Can you see anything about the theme in verse 3?” (Generally, this is enough to help people to participate.)

- “Is there a command in the passage we should obey?”
- “Is there some example we should follow?”
- “Is there something we should avoid doing?”
- “Is there any promise we should claim?”
- “How do we put into practice what we have learned?”

## Passages for group Bible study

The following are examples of passages that lend themselves for this type of teaching. (If some are too long for your group, the leader studies them beforehand, to select key portions to read.)

## CREATION

Genesis 1:1 to 2:4

Ephesians 2:6-10

Revelation 21:1-5

## SIN

Genesis 3:1-19

Romans 5:12-19

Revelation 22:1-15

## JUDGMENT

Genesis 6:5-7, 7:7-13, 17-22, 8:1-5, 8:18-20

Matthew 24:37-41

Revelation 20:11-15

## ABRAHAM’S FAITH

Genesis 12:1-3, 17:1-8

Galatians 3:6-9, 3:13-17