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general editor

uncommon worship experiences



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leader's
resource

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introduction

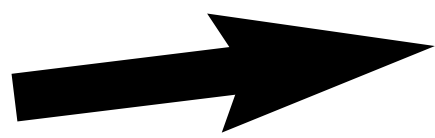
So you're a youth worker! Congratulations! You are called by God to do the most vital ministry in the Body of Christ: training, equipping, discipling and leading young Christians into effective and faithful service for Jesus Christ. Of all the ministry you do on a regular basis, there is none more important than worship.

That might come as a surprise to you, because expertise and experience in leading and teaching worship is not the first thing that the senior pastor expects from the average youth worker. You have camps, Bible studies, activities, trips, counseling and just “hanging” with students to do. Yet of all the treasures you can pass on to students who are eager to follow and please the heart of God, the *best* is a passion for worship. Your students may soon forget the games and crowd breakers that entertain them today, but they will not forget the spiritual depth that you help them plumb through spirit-to-Spirit encounters with the Lord of lords and King of kings.

The objective of this book is very simple: to give you a handbook on how to put together worship experiences that allow God to move among the hearts and lives of today's students. This book was not easy to write, because there is no programming of the Spirit of God. We can design youth ministry activities that have a high certainty of succeeding. We can say, “This game is going to work, guaranteed” or “This method of Bible study will be a blessing to your students.” But we cannot do that with worship, for if we did, we would be making a mockery of the essence of worship. Worship at its core is a face-to-face meeting between believers and God, and you cannot program that!

To paraphrase John 3:8, the Spirit blows where He pleases. We cannot control the Spirit of God; the Spirit controls *us*. We have to discover ways to cooperate with the fresh wind of the Spirit in our midst. In other words, we have to figure out how to catch the next “breeze” the Spirit blows near us. We have to put together experiences for our young people that give the Spirit of God the opportunity to visit our students and lovingly affect their lives.

This book is an exploration of those experiences—to equip your youth for the journey of a lifetime!



UNDERSTANDING WORSHIP

Understanding \an-dən-stand-ing\ **1:** a mental grasp : comprehension **2a:** the power or comprehension, especially the capacity to apprehend general relations of particular things **2b:** the power to make an experience intelligible by applying concepts and principles **3:** interpretation.

You can't learn to worship without preparing yourself! What worthwhile activity doesn't take preparation? The early Saints did it their own years ago when they declared very simply, "Be prepared." How do you prepare for worship? You prepare you!



what worship is

worship is foundational

Worship is the foundation to the life of every believer in Jesus Christ. Worship is not an add-on or dispensable. We don't do worship just because we have nothing better to do. Being a spirited worshiper should be the goal of every Christian's life. Is it your goal?

worship is a meeting of hearts

Worship is where your heart, each student's heart, and God's heart meet. Plain and simple, worship is an encounter with the Creator of the universe. Psalm 22:3 says, "Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel." Imagine God visiting you face to face. Imagine what it must have been like to be Joseph, Mary, Moses or Paul. They didn't have to come up with plans to meet with God; God orchestrated that! He made it happen, and it changed their lives.

worship is a conscious expression of submission to God

"A conscious expression of submission to God" is a weighty phrase, but it is also a very important concept for someone planning worship experiences to understand. When you evaluate the effectiveness of a worship experience, you don't just look at how you or your students "feel" after it; you evaluate its long-range effectiveness by determining whether it brought students closer to Jesus and more devoted to following Him in their daily lives.

worship is an entry into another world

Maybe you feel like your students are already from another world. That's not what we're driving at here. We enter into God's presence through worship and enter into the rule of God. Worship gives us a chance to take a step into the kingdom of God.

Now, think about what you know about the Bible. What happened when Jesus brought the reality of the kingdom of God into people's lives? People were touched; bodies and spirits were healed; salvation occurred; lives were transformed. What does that mean for you and your students? You want something big to chew on? Let's talk consequences. That's right—there are consequences to worship. There's power in worship. Meet that

power—the Spirit of God—and you’re bound to walk away a different person. What are some consequences? The Bible tells us there’s salvation, deliverance, anointing for ministry and unity—and that’s only the beginning!

worship is an expression of love

The best worship is uncomplicated. It is simply an articulation of love. Psalm 18:1 says, “I love you, O LORD.” Jesus told us that we now have the freedom to say, “I love You, Lord” (see Mark 12:33). We don’t have a relationship with God that is framed in formality. We can come with confidence into the presence of God. And, more than that, God is our *Abba* (see Mark 14:36; that’s an expression of parental intimacy in the New Testament). Jesus can’t wait to have you in His presence.

Someone once told me that if the Lord carried a wallet, He would have our pictures in it. Jesus is crazy about you and your students. We seek in worship to build a sense of love between our students and God. How do we do that? How do you fall in love with someone? You get to know the person; you focus on who he or she is and how he or she touches your life in deep and meaningful ways. It’s the same with falling in love with God: Nurture a sense of love for the Lord God. With all the superficiality of love in our modern world, students need to know what real love is! God is love!

worship is personal

Leading worship should be an extension of who we are as a person and our personal relationship with God. Worship must flow from this relationship of intimacy so that we can truly lead others to a place that we ourselves have gone. If worship is merely a ritual or personal talent, the focus remains on us. Personal worship is based on our walk with God . . . our quiet time, our Bible study, our one-on-one times of worship. We can’t take others to a place with God that we ourselves have not yet experienced. Our prayers, song choices and Bible readings should always be an extension of what God is doing in our lives personally at that time.

worship is humbling

The dictionary gives us another definition of “worship”: to “serve a superior.” God is our superior. He is the One we serve with all of our lives. First Peter 5:6 encourages all to “humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” Humbling ourselves is an act of worship. It puts us in a place where we have to ask, “Who am I really serving? Who is really the Lord of my life? What is my humility quotient?” Self-examination in this manner is not only a part of the worship





experience, but it also is a portion of what God wants to do in and through us as we worship. Worship humbles the proud and lifts up the humble.

worship is emotional

Worship should involve all of our emotions and feelings. In other words, there are no rules about what you should or should not feel during worship. The Bible says we can feel joy, sadness, regret, ecstasy, peace and a myriad of other feelings when God touches our lives.

worship is reverential

In Galatians 6:7, Paul says, “A man reaps what he sows.” When it comes to worship, if you and your students expect God to be present and bless you in and through worship, guess what will happen? Be expectant! Don’t approach worship in a cavalier manner; nobody in the Bible was ever praised for having a casual relationship with God. In other words, when it comes to worship, just do it—but do it with reverence!

worship is unifying

Expect worship to build a sense of community among you and your students. Colossians 3:14-16 tells us that worship builds unity. Do you see love grow among students as you worship together?

worship is sacrificial

True worshipers understand that sacrifice must be a regular part of worship. In 2 Samuel 24:24, we read, “King [David] replied to Araunah, ‘No I insist on buying it, for I will not present burnt offerings to the Lord my God that have cost me nothing.’” King David understood that we attach greater value to an item that has cost us something to acquire.

In the area of leading worship, there are two basic areas of sacrifice that must be part of the experience. First, there must be a death to personal pride. Leading worship in any environment should never be about the person or the band but always about the Lord. The job of the worship team is to create an atmosphere in which the worship can be presented to God as a sacrifice. For us as worship leaders, this involves being willing to get out of the way so that people can hear from God, sing to God and respond to His voice. We are merely the instruments that God is using in that capacity.

The second area of sacrifice involves our time and effort. God deserves our best—He deserves worship of excellence. Thus, we must be willing to put in the time to practice and improve our skills, whether that is vocally, on an instrument or in any other form of worship expression. We must



have a heart to grow, develop and reach new levels of worship so that God can continue to be praised at the highest level. Again, this isn't about talent or expressing personal strengths, but rather using the abilities with which God has blessed us and returning them to Him with the highest excellence possible.

worship is a lifestyle

Finally, worship is not restricted to any one time or place—we are called by God to be worshipers in every area of our lives. Worship is our opportunity to present our lives in thanksgiving to the God who loves and saves us. In Romans 12:1, Paul tells us “to offer [our] bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is [our] spiritual act of worship.” Literally, “bodies” refers to our complete life and activity, not merely our physical shells.

It is as we live and move that we choose to either worship God or to deny Him. Worship is in obedience in art, in music, in dance and in any arena that we place God first and honor Him. When our lifestyle is one that is submitted in worship to God on a daily basis, we are able to enter into a worship moment or service and be truly transparent before our holy God. We don't have to “practice” worship or work hard to create the appropriate atmosphere; rather, we simply come before God as we are, present our lives as we are, and give Him honor and thanksgiving in the context of a worship service.

So be an example to your students of worship as a lifestyle choice for you. Don't have your worship life be limited to what you do at church. Tell stories of how worship touches your life and the lives of your students all the time. Students are looking for a role model—someone to emulate and teach them what growing as a Christian means. Allow them to imitate you when it comes to worship. If you think about it, we all learn by imitating others. Teach your young people that worship is something that Jesus said should be done “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Worship is “whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).



what worship is not

worship is not merely an order of service or a liturgy

Worship is an encounter with the living God. An order of service is merely a means to an end. Everything that we do to design worship experiences is a vehicle to get students into the Lord's presence. Worship happens in their hearts. That means if you prefer more of a traditional slant on worship, that's okay. If you do contemporary worship, that is fine too, but remember, your way is not the *only* way. All songs, readings, prayers, liturgies and hymns are instruments that enable us to enter God's presence.

worship is not owned by any one denomination

Whether you are Lutheran, Presbyterian, Assembly of God, nondenominational or whatever, always remember that you don't have the corner on effective worship. Understand this: We are all Christians. Whether we call ourselves Baptists, Catholics or Methodists, we are just describing what "brand" of Christian we are.

We are in denominations based upon a uniformity of preference. In other words, you get a bunch of Christians together who agree on worship practice, doctrine, devotion to God, and so forth, and you have a denomination. What we're driving at is that there is much more to Christian worship than just what happens in *your* church. Your church might do worship really well. That's great! Praise the Lord for that! But other Christians worship God too. That's right! And you might be able to learn something from them.

Here's a sobering truth: God isn't interested in good Presbyterian, good Baptist or good charismatic worship. Instead, He desires worship that is sincere, life-changing, community-building and heart-encountering. So here's a suggestion: Visit other churches. See how they worship. Learn what you can. Look at how they enter God's presence. Incorporate some of their ideas. It will give you not only a sense of unity with other believers but also a foretaste of something we are all going to enjoy for eternity—each other's presence as we worship God together!

worship is not a performance

Just because you might not "do" worship well doesn't mean that it is not effective in your life or in the lives of your students. Just because you

might not have the best worship band or sound system doesn't mean the worship experiences of your students will be bankrupt. Yes, we want to do all with excellence. Yes, we serve and love an excellent God who would not want us to bring the leftovers of our efforts in praising Him. Yet sometimes we are so worried about performance that we simply can't let go and worship the Lord.

Do your best with the gifts and resources God has given you. Don't be envious of what another church has; just be yourself! Other ministries might not have the same tender heart you do. They might not have students who are ready to come into God's presence in the way your students are. God isn't impressed with the stuff of worship; He *is* impressed with lives that are available to Him. We can all provide that!





how to prepare yourself for worship

be a worshiper yourself

Take worship seriously. Watch other worship leaders that you admire and respect. Spend time daily in worship. Students can sense if their leaders are people who enjoy the refreshing presence of God. Students are tuned in to sincerity and authenticity, so they will know. But, more important, you *need* a vibrant and consistent worship life.

Ministry takes it out on your heart, emotions and spirituality. Worship is like coming to a well of water and taking a huge drink. It refreshes you. It is the Powerade® of ministry. You need doses of God's presence in worship. You will be tempted to invest all your time in all the stuff that is required of you in ministry. We've all been there. But I'll tell you something that veterans in ministry know: You will not be able to minister with effectiveness with a heart that is shriveled up because of the demands and drain of ministry. Worship builds hearts—most especially yours!

Read about worship (see the suggested reading section at the back of this book for some ideas). Be part of worship at your church. Show students that you not only support your church's ministry but also that you need worship in your own life. Students are looking for an example or a model to emulate. Remember, many students do not have parents who take worship seriously. If you and your team of leaders demonstrate lives that are tender and eager to worship, you will do your students a lifelong service.

Also keep in mind that a critical view of your church's services only hurts students in the end. You might have a negative opinion of the services at the church where you minister. You might like the worship experiences at other churches better, but the church where you are serving the Lord is your students' church. They might not have the opportunities to worship in other places as you do. If you take shots at the worship in your church, it will rub off on students.

So, if your students are apathetic about the worship of the church, look at yourself first before you criticize them for not desiring worship the way you believe they should. Build up the worship of your church. Talk to the pastor about how the church might be more sensitive to the worship

needs of students. Remember that the key to success in youth ministry isn't just what you see in students' lives today. If your students are active, growing and fruitful Christians in the church 10 years from now, then you can praise God for success. So build up your church's worship!

look at your motives

Many worship leaders are frustrated musicians or performers who simply want to get up in front of people for the sake of personal affirmation. Your personal humility in worship leadership is a must. When you are proud or focused on yourself, worship simply doesn't happen. So try to be as transparent as possible when you lead your students in worship. Don't allow them to focus on you but on Jesus. Remember the words of John the Baptist: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30, *NKJV*). It might be good to write that verse on your guitar case, Bible cover, worship-planning folder—everywhere! It will help you to keep your motives pure.

be prepared

Always be prepared when you lead worship. Take the worship time seriously enough to do these three things:

1. *Pray about it:* come before the Lord for guidance.
2. *Plan ahead for it:* don't just wing it. Prepare for worship as you would prepare for any significant ministry activity. Prepare yourself spiritually, scripturally and musically. Be ready to stand before people and present them with the best you can give as you lead them to the Lord.
3. *Train leaders to lead it:* develop worship teams with designated leaders. Team worship multiplies your ministry's effectiveness and fruitfulness with students over the long haul. It provides more active role models of sincere worshipers in your ministry.

have a set practice time

Always have a consistent practice time for the worship team. If you have more than one team, have each team practice the week before their turn.

don't use too many new songs

Using too many new songs during worship can overwhelm your students. Have a new-song strategy. I try not to introduce more than two or three





new songs a month to the congregation I serve. The point of worship music is to get people away from the words and melody and to focus on Jesus. Too many new songs will focus your worship strategy on trying to learn new words rather than on Jesus!

practice good communication techniques

Maintain good eye contact with your students and use voice inflections when you lead. To make the worship flow more effectively, you might even want to memorize the Bible passage(s) you are using. The less fumbling between resources, the better the worship time will be.

keep the worship flowing smoothly

Now, I have to admit, this is extremely subjective. What might make good worship for me might be different for you. What I mean by “flow” is this:

- How is the worship time moving?
- Are songs, prayers, readings and other worship experiences unnecessarily broken up by uncomfortable pauses or musical key changes?
- Are worship-filled lives interrupted as the leaders look for the next overhead transparency or the right place in the YouTube video? Are they distracted as the leaders fumble between song sheets?

Any good worship time will have a distinct flow to it. Ask someone in your group to help you evaluate when worship times are working and when they are derailed. Look for what causes your worship times to derail and what makes worship work in your group. Here are some additional suggestions for making the worship time flow smoothly with your group:

- Provide smooth transitions between worship songs.
- Carefully plan key changes between songs—and don’t have too many of them.
- Have minimal interruptions between different aspects of worship (readings, prayers, songs, and so forth).
- Allow few moments of silence, unless the worship leader is using the silence for prayer or spiritual meditation purposes.



- Be attentive to the emotional highs and lows that occur in the group as worship proceeds.
- Keep distractions to a minimum. Be sure that sound systems and CDs and/or DVDs are ready and working. Keep the tuning of instruments and worship team movement to a minimum.
- Minimize the number of tempo changes in the songs you choose. If you change the tempo too often, the group will be confused. Either start your worship time with some energetic or upbeat songs, and then move toward slower and more meditative tunes, or start with slower music and move toward upbeat praise and worship.
- Be humble, be expectant, be responsible, be loving, be yourself!

Using worship planning sheets will help you plan effective and flowing worship times (see pages 84-100).

understand your students

Every youth worker needs to be a student of today's culture. Today's students are different from you and look at the world differently, and there are some things every youth worker needs to know about twenty-first-century students.

students are in a culture that reinvents itself every three to five years

You might feel like you are on the cutting edge with the worship songs and techniques that you highly value. I remember singing a song that I really loved and telling students that it was a contemporary song. One student asked when it was written. When I checked, I found that it had been written in 1972! So much for cutting edge.

You are going to have to know what's happening in the culture. Listen to your students' music. Go to Christian bookstores and ask someone to point out what music most students are listening to and buying. Experiment with drum machines and rhythm tracks on keyboards. Visit Christian websites that cater to young people. Change the tempo of the songs you know: A more aggressive or progressive musical beat will result in something completely different.

The joy of and frustration with doing ministry with today's students is that you cannot rely on the stuff that has always worked. You've got to know what's happening now! Capitalize on the ever-changing world of your students.



students are cross-cultural

Ethnic diversity is not only appreciated, but it is also embraced. That fact itself is going to make a difference in worship experiences. There is no such thing as strictly African-American, Anglo or Hispanic worship experiences. The focus these days is “multicultural,” which can be a challenge in worship. Know what’s happening with worship around the country. A good leader has to have a worldview that embraces all cultures. Subscribe to *Worship Leader* magazine (www.worshipleader.com), look for worship resources online, and read books on worship that will broaden your worship horizons.

technology is a part of students’ everyday lives

New technology seems to appear almost monthly, if not weekly, and it is rapidly assimilated by young people today. Students are used to computers, PowerPoint presentations, iPod media players and other technology. It has changed their way of thinking and learning. They can take in massive amounts of input. What that means for you as a worship leader is that you need to find ways to incorporate that technology in the way you and your students worship. Ask your students to help you. Remember, when you talk technology, you’re talking their language.

students learn in six-minute to eight-minute spurts

In practical terms, that means you need to keep worship moving and changing. You cannot beat songs to death or do long sets of music without changing something. Capitalize on change to hold students’ attention and keep worship experiences fresh. Incorporate different ideas to make transitions in worship interesting.

students are highly visual learners

Find ways to bathe students’ senses. Because we cannot see God, we must find ways to give students visual experiences of the presence of God. Point out in worship experiences when you or a fellow student is being moved or challenged. Stop and give a talk about what is happening. Give students an opportunity to clap their hands. Let them look at something (a snippet of a DVD or YouTube spot, a picture, a PowerPoint presentation) or give them an opportunity to use their imagination (read a story, direct a meditation) to add punch to their worship experiences.

students live in a time of high moral relativism

Many students are struggling with the idea of absolute truth. You cannot negotiate on the meaning and power of Christianity. Unashamedly pro-

claim the name, power and presence of the living God. Remember, Jesus is *the Way, the Truth and the Life*. Emphasize that to your students over and over again.

students are serious about life and concerned about their future

Experts affirm that young people are not part of a carefree generation. Don't be afraid to engage your students in serious worship. Don't apologize for asking them to get into the depths of faith.

students are highly relational

They need relationships because of the alienation, abandonment and loneliness of their age. Build worship experiences that enhance community. Holding hands, saying prayers in unison and singing together are just a few ways to meet their needs and to enhance worship.

students have to see the real you in worship

Despite what today's world culture may indicate, image isn't everything. You and the rest of your team have to be willing to be "earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7, KJV). Let them know how you are learning and growing. Let your students see and hear your inner turmoil. Give permission for your students to be real in worship. The last thing we want to do is to encourage them to be stoic in worship.

**use different instruments and
worship themes**

Finally, there are two ideas to consider when putting together the worship for a group. First, *consider using instruments in worship that might be new to your students*. Try using kazoos, dulcimers, musical saws, and so forth. (If you can't think of any new or unusual instruments, visit <http://www.oddmusic.com/gallery> to see a wide selection.) Second, *consider themes for each worship team*. This would give diversity to each week's worship. For instance, one team would have a ska theme, another R&B or hip hop, and so forth.



even if you're not a singer, you can lead worship

When worship is done right, it connects teens with God and each other like nothing else. But it can be difficult for teens to overcome their insecurities and inhibitions to enter God's presence. Now, with *Uncommon Worship Experiences*, you can invite students to trade their self-doubt for confidence in God's love and acceptance! This comprehensive resource will help you create a culture of worship in your group by fostering an atmosphere of freedom and leading by example.

Inside you will find articles and Bible studies that explore every facet of worship—what it is, what it is not, why we do it, how to do it right, and much more. Also included are reproducible planning and evaluation sheets, creative group prayers, biblical meditations and activities, sample worship service plans, a sample camp worship booklet and tons of helpful suggestions for creating a worshipful environment at your next group meeting, Sunday School class, retreat, camp, lock-in or outreach program. With *Uncommon Worship Experiences*, you will have all the tools you need to enter God's presence and bring your group along!

I don't know anyone who knows and understands the needs of the youth worker like Jim Burns.

DOUG FIELDS

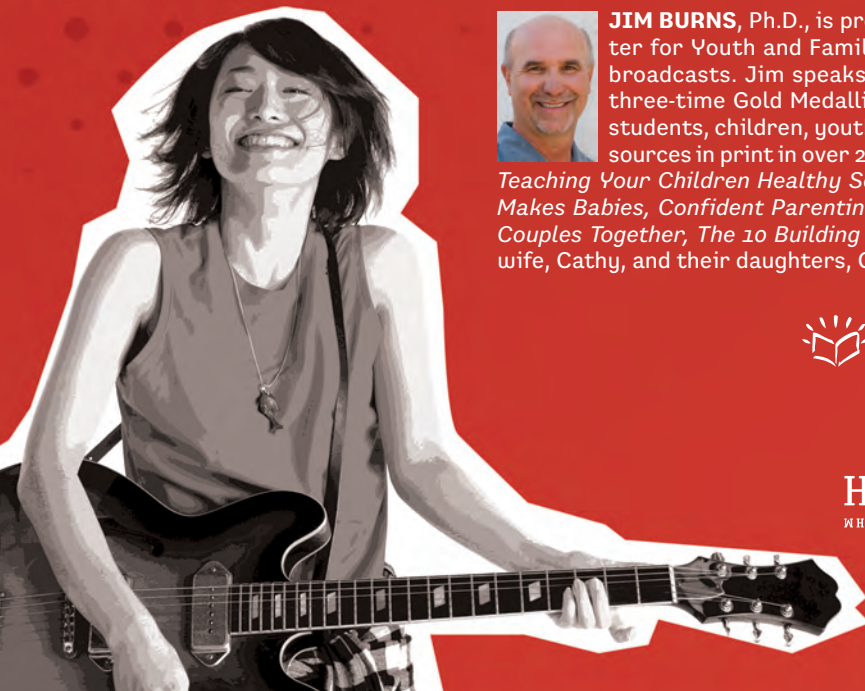
President, Simply Youth Ministry
(www.simplyyouthministry.com)

I heartily recommend these studies.

RICK WARREN

Author of *The Purpose Driven Life*

- More than 100 tools, tips and ideas for understanding worship and building worship in your group times
- Contains worship planning sheets for use in designing worship services
- Includes sample youth worship service programs for use in churches or at camps and retreats and a camp worship booklet
- Several Bible studies on worship are also included to enable your students to interact with worship in Scripture
- Includes CD-ROM with easy-to-print files of every article and additional responsive readings
- Edited by Jim Burns, one of today's leading authorities on youth ministry



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