

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

in uncertain times

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8. Praise

This is the last in a series of spiritual exercises to be used by groups.

Begin by saying that the prayer meeting today will be devoted to praising. Explain that before you praise God together, you would like the group to have a go at praising each other.



Ask each person to write down the names of the others in the group. Then against each name ask them to write down at least one thing (more if they like) that they like or admire about that person. It could be something that the person is, or something they person have said or done. When everyone has finished, go around the group one at a time and ask each member to share what they have written about that person.

Explain that praising is mostly done through words, but it can also be done through actions. Choose one member of the group and ask them to stand. Remind the group what they have already said about this person and suggest that the group give him/her a standing ovation. Everyone should stand and clap or cheer or whistle or whatever. When they have finished ask the person you have praised how they feel about it. (If you feel the group is too small for this exercise, or if you are meeting by Zoom, you may prefer to leave this section out.)

Next ask the group to repeat the writing exercise again, but this time to make God the subject. Ask them to write down all the things they like or admire about God, who he is, and what he has done or said.

Then ask people to speak out their praises to God. Suggest that they praise him for one thing at a time, and keep each prayer quite short. Encourage them not to leave gaps between the prayers – as soon as one person has prayed, someone else should come in straight away. Carry on like this until the praises die down – if things go well, this should take some time.

Then say that as well as speaking out our praises we can sing our praises. Choose two hymns or songs of praise, hand out the words, and find a recording which will give you the tune. *'How great thou art'* would be a good choice, or *'Praise my soul, the king of heaven'*.

Before you sing, direct the group's attention to Psalm 134, and particularly to verse 2. Explain to the group what you personally usually do with your hands when you sing God's praises, and suggest that they try it as you sing these songs together.

Explain that God inhabits praise. If we praise him with all of our hearts, he will draw near to us. Ask if that has been their experience today.

Then say that when God draws near to us it is natural to worship him. End the session by singing not a praise song, but a worship song, for example *'Jesus we enthrone you'* or *'He is Lord'* or *'You are a holy God'*. Worship is not quite the same as praise; to praise someone means to say affirming things about them, whereas to worship someone means to bow down before them, or to adore them. Praise songs are best done noisily, worship songs are usually best sung quietly. When you praise it is natural to raise your hands; when you worship it is natural to bow heads or to kneel.