

Lesson 13 / February 28, 2010

# A New Way to Worship

for use as

## STEP 1

Lesson 13

### Focus:

Go beyond yourself to worship Jesus.

Lesson 13

### Bible Basis:




Matthew 26:6-13

Learn about one church's approach to worship to begin a consideration of your own style of worship.

**OPENING ACTIVITY:** Working Hard at Hospitality

**H**ospitality is hard work. Making sure a guest feels welcomed, included, and well fed requires creativity and teamwork. When someone makes you feel warm and appreciated, it makes you want to be around that person. You are drawn to the good feelings they give you. As Christians, it is honoring God when we treat others like brothers and sisters in Christ. It is one way to worship Him.

Think about someone who makes you feel warm and welcomed when you are with that person.

-  Why do you think you are drawn to this person? Are they funny? A good listener?
-  Should a church or Sunday school class also be warm and welcoming? If so, explain how that can happen.
-  How is being warm, welcoming, and inclusive an important part of a church's worship?

**OPENING STORY:** [read it aloud to your class, or make copies and pass it around]

### IGNITING THE SPIRIT IN NEW WAYS

Beginning this month, the first service on Sunday mornings at Loray Baptist Church in Gastonia, North Carolina, has been mostly unscripted.

"It's different," said the Rev. Kent Cranford, pastor of the 105-year-old church located in Gastonia's west-end community. "I don't walk in with a sermon."

The new 9 a.m. service, titled "Ignite Worship," is exploring alternative ways to worship, both old and new, and is driven by the needs and expressions of its participants. "Everyone who comes contributes," says Cranford.

Lesson 13  
**Memory Verse**

“I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

—Matthew 26:13

During the first year, the services are examining and reflecting upon the Book of Revelation as a book of worship and hope rather than prophecy of modern-day catastrophe. Referring to the service as a developing worship event, Cranford says the group is using music, drama, art, and items associated with older types of worship such as candles and incense. Most importantly, there is dialogue, an ongoing conversation about faith.

In the initial service, in spite of a winter storm that caused many area churches to cancel or postpone services, 39 people joined together to worship “with testimonies, prayers, singing hymns a cappella, reading Scripture, and dialogue,” according to Cranford. The pastor was “overwhelmed” with the response, especially with the number of senior adults who braved the bad weather to come and with the visit of a house church from a nearby community who came to blow Jewish shofars to begin the service.

Citing changes in society and culture, and recognizing many people have little or no connection to traditional church or are in a younger generation that has grown up in a post-church environment, Cranford observes an ever-increasing need to discover new paths to worship.

“Until the last 20 years, especially in the South, people looked to the church for guidance in community and family life and lived within those parameters,” he said, going on to say that today, the church does not have the power over culture it once did.

There are those who want to fight against that by waging war against culture. “That’s not going to work,” says Cranford, arguing that churches have to work within culture to figure out what authentic voice the church can have. While culture is always in transition, Cranford maintains that most church services today are based on a 1950s or 1980s culture of worship that limits people’s connection to it. This gap in relevancy has pushed some people away and rendered them unable or unwilling to explore and expand their faith within a traditional church setting.

Through his ministries, scholarly work, and teaching—Cranford is an adjunct professor of religion at Gaston College—Loray’s pastor sees a yearning among people to reconnect to ancient beginnings. “People want to get back to early forms to re-create the church before all the structures and traditions were in place,” he said.

These observations guided Cranford’s choice to begin the service dialogue with messages from the Book of Revelation.

“I don’t look at the book as most people do, as doom and gloom,” he said. “I understand it as a guide to first century worship reflective of the problems people were going through in Roman times.”

Cranford describes Revelation as a very worshipful book replete with blessings (beatitudes), hymns, and the symbols of vintage Christianity. Moreover, he says the book demonstrates an attitude of worship and the value of the open-ended conversation in faith-seeking. “Someone is speaking; someone is listening.”

## Lesson 13

# Memory Verse

"I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

—Matthew 26:13

"Many churches provide programs that say 'come in and be like us,' " says Cranford. "We want to offer opportunity for individuals to come in as they are and learn from each other—to provide a safe place for that."

Cranford explains that most settings for alternative worship arise outside of church—in storefronts or halls. "This service, open-ended and open to change, will be welcome within an established church."

Efforts to explore new approaches to worship are often met with criticism, but Cranford insists that reaching further into today's culture to attract people to faith does not change the teachings of Jesus.

"It gets back to the core of what Jesus did—He gathered disciples and people from all walks of life around to talk and answer questions," Cranford said. "People are looking for a fresh experience of God. A new experience doesn't deny the truth."

According to Cranford, fear of what is different is the main obstacle for most churches to embrace new approaches. He champions the spirit of outreach within his own congregation.

"They love and trust me and they've seen how the church has made a difference in the community," he said. "They are willing to try something when they believe God is in it."

Loray Baptist's 11 a.m. traditional service is secure. "We aren't throwing the baby out with the bathwater," said Cranford who expresses hope that participants will not only learn new and ancient ways to worship but will also gain a new appreciation of classical forms of worship.

[Form small groups and discuss the following questions]

- ▶ Would you want to attend "Ignite Worship"? Why or why not?
- ▶ Why do you think it is difficult for some Christians to accept new ideas regarding worship?
- ▶ Has worship been a point of debate at your church? For example, have people argued over whether to sing traditional hymns or new praise songs, or whether to have a worship band or keep the traditional organ?
- ▶ In what ways is the church showing hospitality to their community through this new service?
- ▶ Have you made any changes in how you worship over the years, or do you worship pretty much like you always have? Explain your answer.

When you are finished with the questions, go on to Step 2 in your *Adult Teacher's Guide*. Your Step 4 appears below.

News Sources:

Zenda Douglas, "Loray Baptist hopes its 9 a.m. service will 'ignite' the spirit in new ways," *The Gaston Gazette* (North Carolina)  
[www.gastongazette.com/articles/baptist-43401-service-loray.html](http://www.gastongazette.com/articles/baptist-43401-service-loray.html)

adult

**real life**  
DOWNLOADED  
Sunday School That Clicks

Lesson 13 / February 28, 2010

# A New Way to Worship

for use as

STEP 4 

Lesson 13  
**Focus:**

Go beyond yourself to worship Jesus.

Lesson 13  
**Bible Basis:**

Matthew 26:6-13

Lesson 13  
**Memory Verse**

“I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

—Matthew 26:13



Students will consider their response to worship.

## WORSHIP IN THE NON-TRADITIONAL WAY

**T**he Gospel of John tells us it was Mary who poured ointment on Jesus’ feet. We know that Mary, unlike most of us when we are expecting guests, seemed more interested in being a listening ear for her guests than in attending to the things that needed to be done around the house (Luke 10:38-42). Mary didn’t seem to care about preparing for a person’s visit—she was more concerned with participating in the visit. When Jesus came to visit, Mary simply sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to Him.

Mary is a great picture of worshipful action. She was at Jesus’ feet washing them; she wanted to take care of Him because she loved Him and knew who He was. She seemed to understand things or at least act upon them in ways that others did not. Jesus said her actions would be shared along with the Gospel as an example of wonderful worship and service. She went above and beyond what most of us do to show love for Jesus. This is the kind of worship He longs for from all of us.

Discuss:

-  What prompts you to neglect precious time with Jesus?
-  What are some ways you could worship Him beyond what you usually do?

Finally, close the session in prayer. Thank God for the gift of His Son Jesus and ask Him to forgive us for not always worshiping Him extravagantly like Mary did.

(David C. Cook is not affiliated with and does not endorse any Website listed on these pages.)