

WORSHIP IN TRAGEDY

Psalm 34:15-19, John 16:33 // Death and Life

This worship gathering calls us to reflect, pray, and respond to tragedies around us. It was planned following the February 14, 2018, shooting in Parkland, Florida. Here are some materials to get you started creating your own worship service.

MAIN THEME: *How do we respond in times of tragedy?*

CHOOSING MUSIC // FOR SINGING

- ✪ **Holy, Holy, Holy** [Suggested key: D]
Text: Reginald Heber | Tune: NICAEA by John B. Dykes
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- ✪ **Lord, I Need You** [Suggested key: G]
Text and Music: Christy Nockels, Daniel Carson, Jesse Reeves, Kristian Stanfill, Matt Maher
© 2010 worshiptogether.com Songs, sixsteps Music, Thankyou Music, Valley of Songs Music, Sweater Weather

- ✪ **I Will Arise and Go to Jesus**
Text: Joseph Hart | Tune: RESTORATION from Walker's *Southern Harmony*
© Public Domain

- ✪ **Beautiful Things**
Text and Music: Michael Gungor
© 2009 worshiptogether.com songs (Admin Capitol CMG Publishing)

CREATING DRAMA // FOR HEARING

Consider reading a portion of the Lazarus story where we see Christ grieving. John 11:1-27 is the source of that text, though we'd shorten it. Also, consider Psalm 34 as an option.

FINDING ART // FOR SEEING

If the images aren't too troubling, use pictures from the news as a way to engage and pray for people in Parkland, Florida.

LIVING WORSHIP // FOR DOING

Consider asking teenagers to write a note to someone in Parkland, Florida, expressing their sympathy. Alternatively, you might guide teenagers in writing a representative or senator from their state to voice their thoughts on the Parkland situation.

MAKING SPACE // FOR WORSHIPPING

Create a safe space. Remember, nothing about this is easy. If this is the first or fiftieth time you're addressing a tragedy or crisis through worship, it's not normal. Use a familiar environment. Ease into the topic with worship elements that are known or comfortable to your teenagers.

WRITING POETRY// FOR PRAYING

Give students a time of silence to see the image referenced in our sample worship service while reading or hearing this poem, written by a minister, Joseph A. Novak, and used with permission.

FOR THE UNKNOWN WOMAN IN PARKLAND WITH ASHES ON HER BROW

Joseph A. Novak

*Ashes on her head,
mortality smeared across her brow,
streams of salted anguish
and hopeless despair
carving canyons of fear,
exiling every trace of her every sense
of goodness
or fairness
or justice,
a mother weeps.*

*She weeps for children,
whose bodies strewn and bullet-riddled,
have been coerced into becoming silent
witnesses
in a cacophonous land
to the fact that what is right
is hardly what is done,
and what is done
is never enough,
until all that remains
is this ash-crossed mother
clutching onto whoever passes before her
pleading for the sake of the children
some her own—bone of her bone—
others belonging to another,*

*pleading the God who,
that very morn,
marked her for death,
her Ash Wednesday spirit
bleeding for comfort
from the Shepherd
whose rod hurts
and whose staff injures.*

*Where is her comfort?
Where is her relief?
They have been locked up
behind a padlocked door for which there is no
key,
and all she can do
is beat on that ancient door
and demand that it be opened
unto her ash-crossed forehead
and her tear-soaked mortal face.*

*Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.*

(Used with permission.)

SAMPLE WORSHIP SERVICE

Death and Life // Psalm 34:15-19, John 16:33 // A Worship Service for Tragedy

GATHERING

[Once teenagers are gathered together for worship, offer a word of welcome. Remind them they are in a safe space. Reinforce that safe spaces are often times where we can process difficult situations like the one they've seen on the news this week.]

PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

10 seconds of silence

SCRIPTURE READING

Read a scripture passage such as Psalm 34:15-19.

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. The face of the Lord is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.

SONGS

[Sing 1-2 familiar songs together, but consider choosing parts of those songs that speak to the situation. This will make the songs more poignant. We've chosen to start with part of a familiar hymn, then go into a more well-known praise and worship song.]

Holy, Holy, Holy

Holy, Holy, Holy!
Though the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye made blind by sin,
Thy glory may not see,
Only Thou art holy;
There is none beside Thee,
Perfect in pow'r, in love, and purity.

Lord, I Need You

PRAYER

[Invite a teenager or adult to lead a prayer that acknowledges the reality of the day. Acknowledge who God is and acknowledge we are fallen humanity. If you pray with scripture, consider using John 16:33 as a guide. If you prefer a scripted prayer, consider using this one we've adapted from the Book of Common Prayer Collect on Peace.]

God, give, we pray, in every heart the true love of peace, and guide with your wisdom those who rule the nations of the earth, that in peace and tranquility your dominion may increase until the earth is filled with the knowledge of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

SEEINGS, HEARING, AND PRAYING

[Sometimes, art helps us better see, hear and pray. Give students a time of silence to see this image and read or hear this poem, written by a minister, Joseph A. Novak, and used with permission.]

Image: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/parkland-florida-school-shooting-stoneman-douglas-high>

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PRAYING TOGETHER

[Spend time in prayer together. You can do something creative with post-it notes, for instance. Place a backpack or two on the front of the worship space, and invite teenagers to place post-it notes with their prayers for Parkland victims around the backpacks. If you'd rather, use a scripted prayer such as the prayer we've adapted here reprinted by permission from *The Worship Sourcebook*, © 2004, CRC Publications.]

Let us bring the needs of the church,
 the world, and all in need, to God's loving care.
 Please respond to the words, "Lord, in your
 mercy," by saying "hear our prayer."

God of heaven and earth,
 through Jesus Christ you promise to hear us
 when we pray to you in his name.
 Confident in your love and mercy
 we offer our prayer.
 Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Empower the church throughout the world in
 its life and witness.
 Break down the barriers that divide
 so that, united in your truth and love,
 the church may confess your name,
 share one baptism,
 sit together at one table,
 and serve you in one common ministry.
 Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Guide the rulers of the nations.
 Move them to set aside their fear, greed,
 and vain ambition and to bow to your sovereign
 rule.
 Inspire them to strive for peace and justice,
 that all your children may dwell secure,
 free of war and injustice.
 Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Restore among us a love of the earth you
 created for our home.
 Help us put an end to ravishing its land, air,
 and waters,
 and give us respect for all your creatures,
 that, living in harmony with everything you
 have made,
 your whole creation may resound in an anthem
 of praise to your glorious name.
 Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Renew our nation in the ways of justice and
 peace.
 Guide those who make and administer our laws

to build a society based on trust and respect.
 Erase prejudices that oppress;
 free us from crime and violence;
 guard our youth from the perils of drugs and
 materialism.
 Give all citizens a new vision of a life of
 harmony.
 Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Look with compassion on all who suffer.
 Support with your love
 those with incurable and stigmatized diseases,
 those unjustly imprisoned,
 those denied dignity,
 those who live without hope,
 those who are homeless or abandoned.
 As you have moved toward us in love,
 so lead us to be present with them in their
 suffering in the name of Jesus Christ.
 Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Sustain those among us who need your healing
 touch, especially those in Parkland.
 Make the sick whole.
 Give hope to the dying.
 Comfort those who mourn.
 Uphold all who suffer in body or mind,
 not only those we know and love
 but also those known only to you,
 that they may know the peace and joy of your
 supporting care.
 Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

O God,
 in your loving purpose
 answer our prayers and fulfill our hopes.
 In all things for which we pray,
 give us the will to seek to bring them about,
 for the sake of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

SMALL GROUP CONVERSATION

[Instead of teaching or preaching on this night,
 consider small group conversations. Place students
 in small groups of 3-4 to reflect, process, and
 respond together. Have an adult or older teenager

facilitate the conversation. Consider using these or
 other questions, or others of your own.]

- How did you hear about the events of Parkland
 this week?
- How did you respond when you heard the
 news?
- How did you feel when you heard the news?
- What are the promises of scripture for us in
 times like these?
- How can we, as Christians, respond to what we
 have seen, heard, and touched this week?

RESPONDING

[Wrap up small group conversation, then ask
 teenagers in a large group how they can respond to
 what they have seen, heard, and touched this week.
 As a church leader, you might provide a way for
 them to respond together as individuals or a youth
 group that is appropriate for your congregation.]

SENDING

Choose a familiar song to sing. We chose *Beautiful
 Things*.