



Leading Children in God-Centered Worship

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Philosophy of Worship

1. Why do we worship God?

- a. God is worthy of our worship.

Psalm 18:3, Psalm 33:1, Psalm 96:7-9, Psalm 145:3, Philippians 2:9-11

- b. We are created to worship.

1 Peter 2:9, Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Revelation 7:9-12

“Worship” is the term we use to cover all the acts of the heart and mind and body that intentionally express the infinite worth of God. This is what we were created for, as God says in Isaiah 43:7, “Everyone who is called by my name, and whom I *have created for my glory...*” That means that we were all created for the purpose of expressing the infinite worth of God’s glory. We were created to worship. – John Piper <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/bodies-breakfast-and-the-marriage-bed>

2. How do we worship God?

- a. In spirit and truth, with both heart and head.

John 4:23-24, Psalm 95:1-7

- b. Worship: The Feast of Christian Hedonism—Chapter 3 from *Desiring God*, by John Piper (Colorado Springs: Multnomah).

- o Worship must have heart and head. Worship must engage emotions and thought.
- o Worship must be vital and real in the heart, and worship must rest on a true perception of God.
- o Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of biblical worship.

- c. Talk **to** God, Not Just About Him – devotional by John Piper <http://dsr.gd/1dyIHAL>

3. How is worshiping with children different than worshiping with adults?

- a. Children differ in their ability to understand God, themselves and their relationship to Him.
- b. Children differ in their ability to understand language, ideas and how we talk about God.
- c. Leaders must lead in ways that are developmentally age appropriate.
- d. Leaders must take into account children who are not yet believers.
- e. Leaders bear a responsibility in nurturing faith and modeling worship themselves. This gives children a language and example by which they may learn to worship rightly now and in the future.

Practical Aspects of Planning and Leading

1. How do I plan a time of worship with children?

- a. Pray for the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit. (Psalm 127:1, John 14:26)
- b. Be well acquainted with the overall scope of the curriculum and the specific lesson for that day.
- c. Determine the focus of your worship time.
- d. Know what the song lyrics are expressing and consider the following:

- o Do they fit well with the day's lesson, the curriculum in general, your focus of worship?
- o Are they filled with big and glorious truths while still understandable to the children?
- o Do they build faith in our amazing God and the wonders of His redemption?
- o Is there an appropriate melding of the music and lyrics?
- o Will they benefit the children if they sing them over and over during the week? During the next year? During the next ten years? Are they worth memorizing?

2. What kinds of songs should be considered?

a. Favorite Sunday school songs of substance

- o My God is So Big
- o Jesus Loves Me

b. New, fresh, worship songs written specifically for children (Psalm 96:1)

☐ Sovereign Grace Music: *Awesome God, To Be Like Jesus* and *Walking With the Wise*. Download guitar charts, lead sheets, lyrics and piano scores for free at sovereigngracemusic.org

c. Scripture songs

- o *Hide 'Em In Your Heart, Bible Memory Melodies*, with Steve Green, Volume 1 & 2
- o *Praise and Worship for Kids*. All titles by Frank and Betsy Hernandez.

d. Traditional hymns

- o *Hymns for a Kid's Heart*, vol. 1 - 4, Bobbie Wolgemuth and Joni Eareckson Tada, Books with CDs containing true stories, prayers, scripture and richly orchestrated music
- o Tell them about the composer and circumstances surrounding the writing of the hymn.
- o Explain difficult words or concepts—a little bit each week.
- o Try doing a hymn a month, or 4-6 learned well over the course of a Sunday school year.
- o Hand motions help children focus on words and help settle the wiggles in young bodies.

e. Songs from your all-church gatherings

f. Songs from other cultures or in other languages (Have missionaries help with this)

g. Words are important! Take time to help the children understand what they are singing about.

3. What else should be incorporated into the worship time?

a. Scripture

- o Read enthusiastically as a call to worship.
- o Read before singing a scripture song or to call attention to the main point of a song.
- o Worship by proclaiming the God's Word with memory verses.

b. Prayer

- o Individual teachers and children pray short phrases of praise or thanks related to the character or work of God. The first few times, invite a few adults or kids to lead out in prayer (others will follow).
- o Give an example of how they could start their prayer, e.g. "Lord, your faithfulness is great because..." or "We praise you, God, because..."

4. How do I organize songs, scripture and prayer into a meaningful worship time?

a. Consider using a format for planning worship. For example:

Call to Worship

- o Calls us to seek after, draw near and worship God
- o Vertical focus on God

Praise and Adoration

- o Directed to God or about His character
- o Expressions of praise, thanksgiving, love and trust

Teaching

- o Teach a new song, explain words, ask questions and get responses, read a hymn story, teach hand motions (more interactive)
- o Songs that explain big truths about God and the Gospel

Response

- o Songs of commitment, blessing, witness and prayer
- Review and reinforce anything new from the previous week.
 - Think about the mood or pacing of the worship time, e.g. exuberant to reflective, or the reverse (depending on when in the overall schedule it is especially in relation to teaching time).
 - Direct songs speak directly to God and use the word *You*. Indirect songs speak about God and use the word *He*.
 - Dot down notes to yourself soon after the worship time is over to help you plan for next time.

Be intentional in your planning. Determine to plan and lead worship in a way that helps the children grow in their knowledge, love, and trust of God.

Developmental and Musical Considerations

1. Song Lyrics

- Learn by rote through 1st grade
- Begin reading lyrics in 2nd grade or when words will be an aid to teaching and not a hindrance.
- Be aware of the wordiness of songs. Are words visually overwhelming to young readers?
- Make sure that visuals containing lyrics are readable (large enough) and legal.
- Christian Copyright Licensing International, CCLI, website www.ccli.com

2. Vocal Range

- Vocal range should not be a hindrance to participation by being either too high or too low.
- Comfortable range for children: low A (below middle C) up to high D (11 notes above).

3. Repetitious Songs

- Echo, call and response, or repeating phrase
- Quickly learned
- Use in settings of diverse age groups. Young children can join in on repeated phrases.

4. Improvising

- Works best with simple songs for younger children.
- Children contribute ideas (encourages focused involvement and creativity—and it's fun!)

5. Signing and Hand Motions

- Focuses attention to words and their meaning.
- Learning retention increases when multiple senses are involved.
- Website: www.aslpro.com - includes a section on religious signing
- Book: *Religious Signing: A Comprehensive Guide for All Faiths*, by Elaine Costello (New York: Bantam Books, 2009).

6. Full Body Movement

- a. Preschoolers through 2nd grade—include movement in most worship times.
- b. Give purpose to their movement with comments like:
 - o Let's jump with the strong legs God gave you.
 - o Sweep the driveway or wash the car for the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31)
 - o Stamp your feet like a mighty, roaring volcano that God made.
 - o Let's march around the room praising God like King David when he returned the ark.

7. Accompaniment Instruments

- a. Be comfortable with your instrument and know your music well—simplify if needed.
- b. Maintain eye contact and be aware of responses of the children.
- c. Accompaniment should support worship leadership without being the main focus.

8. Rhythm Instruments

- a. Use as an opportunity to teach about praising God with instruments. (Psalm 150 & 149:1, 3)
- b. Adds a sense of celebration and joy when used with upbeat songs.
- c. Encourage a steady beat and careful handling of instruments.
- d. Have a signal for "stop playing".
- e. Preschool through 2nd grade: If possible have enough instruments for all children.
- f. 3rd Grade and up: Half dozen instruments; children taking turns from week to week
- g. Purchase reasonable prices rhythm instruments at www.rhythmband.com
- h. Create own instruments (e.g. popcorn in tea tins or stapled within paper plate tambourines)

9. Student Instrumentalists

- a. Identify student instrumentalists (e.g. piano, violin, guitar, etc.) in your classroom (or older).
- b. Practice with them ahead of time.
- c. Encourages young musicians to play in a worship setting and for the glory of God.

10. What about multiple age groups meeting together in worship?

- a. Find songs that have repeating phrases, echoes, or can be sung in a round.
- b. Give older children leadership roles with upfront singing, scripture reading, instruments, sound and visual equipment.
- c. Include movement opportunities for younger children.
- d. Decide how you will organize your worship themes from week to week.

11. How can kids take on leadership roles during the worship time?

- a. Singing up front with the worship leader—individually or as a worship team (important to help them learn it's not about them)
- b. Reading scripture or reciting from memory
- c. Leading hand motions and signing
- d. Playing instruments: rhythm instruments, flutes, violins, etc.
- e. Operating sound and visual equipment

12. A few final remarks about planning and leading

- a. Weave the worship time together with reverent comments that direct the children's attention to God.
- b. Be careful not to talk too much.
- c. Be open to making changes in your plans as the Holy Spirit leads.
- d. Pray for God to come with His amazing grace as you worship together.

Notes:

Resources

New Music for Children

- **Sovereign Grace Music**, resource available online at www.sovereigngracemusic.org. Hear sample songs, download piano, lead, chord, and transparency sheets.

- » *Awesome God*—Worship songs for children age 7 and up focusing on God's attributes.

- » *To be like Jesus*—Songs that teach kids the fruit of the Spirit.

- » *Walking With the Wise*—Songs from the book of Proverbs about what it means to be wise.

Scripture Songs

- *Hide 'Em In Your Heart, Bible Memory Melodies*, with Steve Green, Frank and Betsy Hernandez, Sparrow Records

- » Volumes 1 & 2

- » Praise and Worship for Kids Hymns and Hymn Stories

- *Amazing Grace, 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*, Kenneth W. Osbeck, Kregel Publications.

Author of several different books containing hymn stories.

- *Great Christian Hymn Writers*, Jane Stuart Smith & Betty Carlson, Crossway Books. The authors have detailed the intriguing and often tragic circumstances from which many of our best-loved hymns came.

- *Hymns for a Kid's Heart*, Bobbie Wolgemuth and Joni Eareckson Tada, Crossway Books, Book and CD. Authors collaborate to help you teach twelve classic hymns to the children with richly orchestrated music, true stories, prayers, and scripture.

- » Volumes 1 & 2

- » Passion Hymns for a Kid's Heart

- » Christmas Carols for a Kid's Heart

- *Hosanna Loud Hosannas Student Hymnal*, Keith and Kristyn Getty, <http://www.studenthymnal.com/>

Signing

- *The Joy of Signing*, Lottie L. Riekehof, Gospel Publishing House

- *Religious Signing: A Comprehensive Guide for All Faiths*, Elaine Costello, Bantam Books