

Leading Children in Worship

Many Sunday school and mid-week classes incorporate a time of singing into their schedules. But often the main purpose and goal of this time is not so readily grounded and communicated within a larger context of children's formal biblical education. *Why do we sing? What do we sing? In what manner do we sing?* These are all important questions that should be addressed and should serve to transform this time into something of greater significance than simply singing songs, filling time, and getting the children active.

Why We Sing

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (Revelation 4:11).

The *why* of leading worship in the classroom is this: We are aiming to lead children to worship God, who is worthy of our greatest love, devotion, trust, affections, honor, and praise. This can be expressed through the singing of songs, but it is not limited to singing. John Piper says,

"Worship" is the term we use to cover all the acts of the heart, 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.¹

Helping children understand the *why* of worship should then lead to the *what* of worship: *What do we sing? In what manner should we express the infinite worth of God?* The Bible shows many expressions of worship. Consider just a few verses:

"All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name" (Psalm 66:4).

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! ([Psalm 95:6](#)).

Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! ([Psalm 96:9](#)).

¹John Piper, "Bodies, Breakfast and the Marriage Bed: Meditation on Daily Worship," <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/bodies-breakfast-and-the-marriage-bed>

*Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!
(Psalm 149:3).*

In the classroom setting, it is important to provide children with a wide spectrum of these biblical expressions of worship. We must resist the tendency to lead children only in “fun and energetic” expressions of praise: clapping, playing loud instruments, dancing, etc. Think about this statement from Jerry Bridges:

In our day we must begin to recover a sense of awe and profound reverence for God. We must begin to view Him once again in the infinite majesty that alone belongs to Him who is the Creator and Supreme Ruler of the entire universe.²

Therefore, what we sing and the manner in which we sing should reflect a holy reverence for God and an all-satisfying delight in God. Instead of mere *fun* during worship, we should be aiming children to experience *serious joy!*

Guiding Children to Worship in Spirit and in Truth

For worship of God to be genuine, it must touch upon both the mind and heart. It must recognize the truth about God and His character and deeds, which then produces a right response in the heart.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

It is, therefore, extremely important to choose songs that encourage a right heart response to God’s revealed TRUTH in the Bible: Truth about the triune God and His matchless character, His glorious deeds and promises, and His work of salvation in Christ. (The Truth78 lessons are centered on biblical truth and give the worship leader numerous avenues and ideas for incorporating these truths into the worship time.) But also, keep in mind that genuine worship of God cannot be realized apart from the grace of God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, which makes a person alive to Christ. True worship only comes from true believers in Christ. Consider this important caution in leading children:

“Worshipping God” means different things at different ages. Younger children, who may not know God yet, may still participate enthusiastically in various external forms of

² Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness—Godliness Has Value for All Things*. (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2016), 21.

worshipping God. However, we want their worship to be from the heart, and not simply a matter of conforming. They need a clear knowledge of who God is and what He has done. That includes His nature, His attributes, and His works, especially our redemption through Christ. As the Holy Spirit enables them, they will become increasingly aware of their sinfulness before God, accept His gracious gift of forgiveness through the Gospel, and be included among those who will forever be growing in their love for and worship of God. In the meantime, our job is to help them be “dazzled” by the glory of Jesus Christ (quoting Paul Tripp). For one thing that means using more songs that tell us about God than how we feel about Him.

When our seven-year-old raises her hands, sings out exuberantly, and pays attention to what’s going on, God may indeed have done a genuine work of conversion in her heart. It’s just as possible that she is comfortable with her surroundings and is trying to fit in. True motives are revealed as children grow older.³

This is extremely important to keep in mind when leading children in the worship time. It is fairly simple to encourage children to participate in singing and other outward expressions of praise and doing so is an important part of their biblical education. They are learning the *habits and rhythms* of the Christian life. But the worship leader should also be imploring, guiding, and encouraging the children toward genuine faith in Christ—making clear that true worship that is acceptable to God can only come about through belief in Christ.

Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that leading children in worship is different from leading adults because children differ in their ability to:

- Understand God, themselves, and their relationship to Him.
- Understand language, ideas, and how to talk about God.

So worship leaders must lead in ways that are developmentally age appropriate.

Leading from a Heart of Praise

In leading children in worship, it’s very important to keep in mind that it is not just how we lead but also our *demeanor*. In his sermon, “One Generation Shall Praise Your Works to Another,” John Piper says:

³ Bob Kauflin, “One More Thought on Training Children to Worship God,” <https://worshipmatters.com/2006/03/31/one-more-thought/>

Not only does [Psalm 145:4] speak of the imparting of truth from one generation to another, it speaks of a certain kind of imparting. It is an imparting with exultation and for exultation. Notice the words. It does not say, “One generation shall merely teach Your works to another.” It says, “One generation shall praise Your works to another.” Praise is exultation in God. The education of the next generation must not only aim at exultation, it must involve exultation.

Teachers and parents who do not exult over God in their teaching will not bring about exultation in God. Dry, unemotional, indifferent teaching about God—whether at home or at church—is a half-truth, at best. It says one thing about God and portrays another thing. It is inconsistent. It says that God is great, but teaches as if God is not great.

Psalm 145:4 shows us another way: “One generation shall praise Your works to another.” Let praises carry the truth to the next generation, because the aim of truth is praise. The aim of education is exultation. So let education model exultation in the way it is done.⁴

Therefore, ***the first and most important aspect in leading children in worship is the spiritual preparation of the worship leader*** as your mind is instructed by the Word of God and your heart embraces the Word, giving evidence of heartfelt praise of Him, through Christ.

The Importance of Prayer in Leading Worship

Because true worship can only come about by the sovereign grace of God as He acts upon the human heart, the worship leader must approach every lesson with earnest prayer, entreating the Holy Spirit to be present and be at work in hearts and minds. Many lessons include specific prayer prompts for this purpose.

What follows is both a reflection of these convictions and very practical help in preparing and leading worship time. Please note that these guidelines and suggestions represent an “ideal” situation: having adequate time available, staffing, supplies, etc. in the classroom. Depending on your situation, you may need to greatly simplify your worship time. The Large Group Lesson and Small Group Application are the two essential pillars of Truth78 curriculum and require a

⁴ John Piper, “One Generation Shall Praise Your Works to Another,” <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/one-generation-shall-praise-your-works-to-another>

minimum of 40 – 50 minutes. Therefore, the time available for worship may be anywhere from 5 – 15 minutes.

General Guidelines for Planning and Leading Worship

Work in cooperation with the other members of the team.

- Clearly understand your role and expectations in the classroom, including the allotted amount of time for worship.
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of other classroom volunteers: team leader, teacher, and small group leaders.

At the beginning of the year

- Read the **Preface** and **Introduction** sections of the **Teacher's Guide** in the Truth78 curriculum being taught to the age group you will be leading. Check the **Appendix** and, if included, read the **Worship Songs** for a list of suggested songs for the curriculum.

During the week

- Pray for the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit.
- Be well acquainted with the lesson, especially the Scripture and truths about God that will be taught that day. (Worship leaders should be given a copy of the Truth78 **Teacher's Guide** or, at minimum, a copy of the curriculum **Scope and Sequence** for the class her or she will be leading.)
- As you consider what songs to sing, ask the following:
 - What songs might fit well with the day's lesson or the curriculum in general?
 - Are they filled with big and glorious truths about God, and understandable to the children?
 - Do they encourage faith in God, through Christ?
 - Do the words and tune complement each other?
 - Will they benefit the children if they sing them over and over during the week? During the next year? The next 10 years?
- Look for fresh, worship songs written specifically for children, and Scripture songs
- Incorporate some traditional hymns.
- Have a means of displaying the words to the songs to the class. Are there words and terminology that may need to be defined and displayed? How will you explain these for your particular age group? Consider introducing new hymns, verse by verse over the course of a month for younger children.
- For younger children, incorporate simple hand motions to help children focus on key words and help settle wiggly bodies.

- Look for ways in which the children can participate in helping you lead worship in un-distracting ways.
- When appropriate, include hymns and songs from your corporate worship gatherings.
- Consider using worship songs from cultures or in other languages from time to time.

Other Worship Elements to Consider Including

- Read a portion(s) of Scripture.
 - Read enthusiastically as a call to worship.
 - Read before singing a particular song to focus on the main point of a song.
 - Worship by proclaiming the Word with memory verses.
- Prayer
 - Call on teachers and children pray short phrases of praise or thanks related to the character or work of God.
 - Give an example of how they could start their prayer (e.g., “Lord, your faithfulness is great because...” or “We praise you, God, because...”).

Organizing the Flow of Worship Time –

- Consider using a regularly structured flow of worship: a familiar transition and call to worship time, opening with a short prayer and/or Scripture, familiar song, new song, ending prayer, etc.
- Think about the mood or pacing of your worship time. For example, using exuberant songs at the beginning and then moving to more quiet and reflective songs often better prepares children for the Large Group Lesson.
- Make sure your flow is in keeping with your time limitations.

A Few Final Remarks about Planning and Leading Worship

- Help set an appropriate spiritual atmosphere throughout the duration of the worship time. The children will learn by your example.
- Weave the worship time together with brief and reverent comments that direct the children’s attention to God.
- Be careful not to talk too much.
- Be open to making changes in your plans as the Holy Spirit leads.
- Be attentive to how the children are responding. If need be, stop and refocus their attention toward the greatness and worth of God.
- Provide appropriate guidance and encouragement as they sing: “God is so great, let’s sing to Him in our loudest voices!” Or, “I am so thankful to Jesus for your beautiful voices as you sang that song.”

For further training on leading children in worship, listen to the [Leading Children in God-Centered Worship](#) seminar on our website and print the [Leading Children in God-Centered Worship Seminar Notes](#). (This seminar was produced under our previous name, *Children Desiring God*.)