

## Leading Children in Worship: The Heart and the How

### Workshop Description:

“The workshop will explore how worship through praise helps transform us into the people God wants us to be, and why it is an extremely important part of the spiritual life of children, who have as great of an ability to know God as adults do. We will then look at practical tips and lessons learned in light of the theology discussed and our experience, focusing on how everything we do while leading worship - from times of serious worship to times of joy, fun, and goofiness - can present kids with an accurate representation of who God is. At the end there will be a chunk of time devoted to Q&A, since we want to hear from everyone who will be attending and make sure no question is unanswered!”

### I. Background for the framework

- A. While it can be rewarding, leading worship for kids can also be exhausting, frustrating, and confusing. It often seems like children’s ministries get leftovers from other parts of the church, and it can be easy to get discouraged if we have wrong expectations for what successful worship leading looks like in this context.
  - 1. My own stories from leading kids worship back at CC Heartland.
    - a) “These kids are crazy. Does what we’re doing even matter? How do I even know they *know* what we are doing here? Did he *really* just sneeze on my glasses!”
  - 2. Jake’s experience

### II. The Heart:

- A. Leading worship for kids is part of God’s Mission: Reconciliation and discipleship
  - 1. God’s mission, the reconciliation of heaven and earth in Christ. ([Ephesians 1:10](#), [Colossians 1:20](#))
  - 2. Reconciled humanity looks like a restored personal relationship and discipleship - or apprenticeship ([John 17:3](#), [Matthew 11:28-30](#)), that ultimately leads us to Christlikeness ([Ephesians 4:11-16](#)). The two Greek words most commonly used for “follow me” or “disciple” in the Gospels communicate the idea of knowing someone intimately as well as imitating their actions. Discipleship is intimacy *and* imitation!
  - 3. As disciples we are called into his mission of reconciliation ([2 Corinthians 5:18-19](#), [Matthew 28:18-20](#))
- B. The role of worship in discipleship, reconciliation, and transformation
  - 1. Worship is holistic, and includes all of who we are: body, spirit, emotions, intellect, and social relations ([Romans 12:1-2](#)). Paul mentions both the body and the mind: the *whole* person.
    - a) Paul encourages the Roman church to respond to God’s gracious act of love by leaving behind the pattern of the world, being transformed, and living life according to God’s kingdom. The idea is turning from one life - or kingdom - and entering a new one. For Paul, this is called worship, but in the Gospels Jesus calls this discipleship. In other words, worship *is* discipleship, and discipleship *is* worship.
    - b) Therefore leading kids in worship is *no less* than partnering with God in his mission to reconcile the world to himself! It is part of the overall picture of what it looks like to be a redeemed and renewed human! But what about the music side of worship? Well...
  - 2. Worship through music is significant because it addresses the emotions, imagination, and intellect. It’s a gateway to an intangible part of who we are that is as equally important as the tangible. Our emotions and imaginations are part of the “... bodies...” and “...mind...” that Paul talks about in [Romans 12](#).

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- a) Andrew Peterson says, “*God has given music a peculiar ability to ambush us with the truth.*”
  - b) Sample statement of intent for congregational worship: *Congregational times of praise are, in part, an opportunity for the Word of God (Jesus) to meet people with the truth of His gospel, drawing them into a manifestation of His presence, where this truth can be engaged emotionally, and where healing, deliverance, and restoration can take place in all levels of the human experience. In this context of reconciliation to God, the body of Christ comes together corporately to live out a part of the trinitarian life we have been welcomed into. In these moments we come face to face with our own sinfulness, and the sinfulness of our brothers and sisters. With this transparency, we are, through the gifts and empowering of the Holy Spirit, mutually ministering to one another, and being ministered to, to the end that we are built up into the image of Christ.*
  - c) That said, the goal in leading times of praise for children is to facilitate Biblical worship - or discipleship. The goal is that those who do not know God may come to know him, and that those who are Christians may grow into a deeper knowledge of Jesus as they follow him.
3. Children have an equal capacity for this (the same Spirit, even!), but it will look different since they process and express things differently than adults. They have different emotional and intellectual faculties. We'll hit this again later.

### III. The How:

- A. The Word of God meets people: we need to present an accurate picture of God
  1. **Isaiah 6:1-9**, a foundational scripture for framing what happens in worship, and a story... we all learn through stories, right? Like Narnia? Yay, Narnia! Anyways, in **Isaiah 6:1-9** we see these five things:
    - a) Isaiah sees an accurate picture of the LORD
    - b) Therefore he also sees an accurate picture of himself and his people
    - c) This leads to an awareness of God's grace acting in the mercy of forgiveness
    - d) Out of this forgiveness intimacy with God is gained (he hears God's inner council)
    - e) From this he receives a call to mission
  2. Note parallel experience of Peter in **Luke 5:11**
  3. Note that Isaiah's experience begins with seeing God for all that he really is - an accurate picture of Yahweh. This is key, and our primary responsibility!
- B. Response to the Word: create an environment of transparency and freedom (**Isaiah 6:1-9, Matthew 11:28,30, Hebrews 4:15,16**). Worship is not a one sided communication, but a dialogue with the Trinity that takes place in every corner of our lives. If we are to know him and be changed by him, we need to be able to be honest before him - be it expressions of joy, grief, confession, gratitude, etc. (just look at the diverse emotions in the Psalms!). Note: our response is *always* a response to his love and initiation to meet with us.
- C. Practical implications: How do we do all of this in the context of corporate worship in children's ministry? First, we should acknowledge that while kids are capable of a real, vibrant relationship with Jesus, they process and express things differently than adults. They have different levels of emotional and intellectual faculty. So, we must contextualize - or, more simply, bring it into their level of understanding. So, here's some things we've found helpful:

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1. The leader
  - a) First, remember that the Holy Spirit is the one who leads. We need to be both utterly dependent on and utterly confident in his empowering.
  - b) Be genuine. There is incredible freedom in the gospel to be yourself. Kids can sniff out fakes like a Southerner sniffs out good barbecue or a hipster sniffs out single origin organic espresso, so don't force yourself to be sillier than you are, and don't hold back if you are an absolute phycic (in a good way). The more secure and comfortable you are being you, the more likely relationships that lead to discipleship will occur.
  - c) Speaking of relationships, remember that leading worship is only partly done when you have an instrument and are playing music. A large part is also done through getting to know the kids and their parents and developing friendships.
  - d) Most importantly: immerse yourself in the wonderful true story of Jesus Christ. Rest in the new identity you have in him, and lay aside all things for the greater call of knowing him. Remember that he has loved you first and greatest, and be strengthened by that grace as you do good, redeeming, work for his Kingdom.
2. Songwriting and song selection
  - a) The lyrics need to be scripturally founded and sound
  - b) Focus on telling the wonderfully compelling story of Jesus the Messiah. All of Scripture is important, but it ultimately all leads to him (Luke 24, John, etc).
  - c) Make room for the full spectrum of life with Jesus. This means slow, meditative songs as well as hyperactive, silly, fun songs. We want to give them tools to help them express their hearts to God and respond to him. Thus, there needs to be room for joy, grief, and everywhere in between.
3. Delivery
  - a) Again, be genuine.
  - b) The gateway to kid's engagement tends to be fun and silliness. Often it helps them to tune in, open up, and creates a safe spot for expression. There is great joy in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and this is something we should pursue!
  - c) Another helpful tool for engagement is interaction and inclusion. Worship should be interactive and fun, so seek to include the kids in whatever you can! Prayers, call backs, hand motions, dancing, etc. Remember, you are not performing *for* them, but worshipping *with* them.
  - d) What about kids that don't engage - ever! We should seek to intentionally minister to them in relationship. Meaning, we have found that it is extremely helpful to get to know a kid and their family. This background helps us to minister to them effectively. It means talking to them outside of the time of music and praise. Remember, the goal isn't necessarily engagement, but discipleship. Each kid has a different personality. (Story from Creation Fest)
  - e) Prayer and the reading of scripture is a great way to bridge the gap between dancing, fun, and silliness and more contemplative praise. This can often be interactive, which is ideal!
4. Finally, and most important
  - a) It should be said again: immerse yourself in the wonderfully true story of Jesus Christ. Rest in the new identity you have in him, and lay aside all things of the greater call of knowing him. Remember that he has loved you first and greatest, and be strengthened by that grace as you do good, redeeming, work for his kingdom.