

CORE TRAINING SERIES



# LEADING CHILDREN IN WORSHIP

**MINISTRY ROLE:**  
Worship Leaders

**TARGET AGE:**  
Elementary Classrooms

# LEADING CHILDREN IN WORSHIP

by Jill Nelson



MINISTRY ROLE:  
Worship Leaders

TARGET AGE:  
Elementary  
Classrooms

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. Yes, this can be expressed through the singing of songs, but it is not limited to singing.

**“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.—JOHN PIPER<sup>1</sup>**

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*

*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.<sup>2</sup>**

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*

So, it is 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. Here is an 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 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.<sup>2</sup>**

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” (from Psalm 145:4), John Piper says:

**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.<sup>3</sup>

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 has embraces the Word, giving evidence of heartfelt praise of Him, through Christ.

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 has 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 then, is both a reflection of these convictions and very practical help in preparing and leading worship time.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING AND LEADING WORSHIP

**Work in cooperation with the other members of your 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.

**Preparation 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. (We encourage that worship leaders 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.)
- Determine the specific focus of your worship time with the children.
- As you consider what songs to sing, ask the following:
  - Do they fit well with the day’s lesson, the curriculum in general, and your focus of worship?
  - Are they filled with big and glorious truths about God, while still understandable to the children?

- Do they encourage faith in God, through Christ?
- Is there an appropriate melding of the words and the music?
- 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. If possible, be prepared to give children a brief summary about the composer and circumstances surrounding the writing of the hymn.
- 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.
- 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 Include

- 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 the Worship Time

- Carefully read the lesson and Scriptures, discovering key themes and truths about God.
- Write down songs that come to mind. If possible, work from a list of suggested songs.
- Do not introduce more than one new song on any given week.
- Consider using a format for planning worship. For example:
  1. **Call to Worship:** Calls us to seek after, worship and draw near to God. A vertical focus on God.
  2. **Praise and Adoration:** Directed to God or about His character. Expressions of love, trust, praise and thanksgiving. Focuses on attributes of God from the lesson.
  3. **Teaching:** Teach a new song, explain words, ask questions and get responses, read a hymn story, teach hand motions.
  4. **Response:** Songs of commitment, blessing, witness, and prayer.
- Think about the mood or pacing of your worship time. For example, exuberant to more quiet and reflective often prepares children better for the Large Group Lesson.

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. 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, and be open to making changes in your plans as the Holy Spirit leads. Pray for God to do His work and to meet you as you worship together.

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

- **Rote Learning:** Children hear and repeat.  
Age: through 1st grade
- **Reading:** Starting in 2nd grade, 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 transparencies are readable and legal. Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI): [ccli.com](http://ccli.com)
- **Vocal Range**
  - Vocal range should not pose a hindrance to participation in worship by being either too high or too low.
  - Comfortable vocal range for children: low A (below middle C) up to high D (an octave and a half above).
- **Repetitious Songs**
  - Quickly learned echo, call and response, or repeating phrase.
  - Use with children in diverse age groups. Young ones can sing on repeated phrases.
- **Improvising**
  - Use with simple songs for younger children.
  - Children contribute ideas.
- **Signing and Hand Motions**
  - Focuses attention to words and their meaning.
  - The more senses involved in the learning process, the more is retained.
  - Don't make them too complicated.
  - Respect for American Sign Language
  - Children enjoy leading.
- **Full Body Movement**
  - Preschoolers through about 2nd grade—each worship time
  - 3rd and 4th graders—now and then
  - Give purpose to their movement with comments like:
    - Let's jump with the strong legs God gave you.*
    - Sweep the driveway or wash the car for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)*
    - Stamp your feet like a mighty, roaring volcano that God made.*
- **Accompaniment Instruments**
  - Be very comfortable with your instrument.
  - Know your music well; simplify if needed.
  - Maintain eye contact and be aware of responses of the children.
  - Accompaniment should be helpful and supportive without being the main thing.

- **Rhythm Instruments**

- Use as an opportunity to teach about praising God with instruments. (Psalm 150)
- Adds a sense of celebration and joy when used with upbeat songs.
- Encourage a steady beat and careful handling of instruments.
- Preschool through 2nd grade—if possible, have enough instruments for all children.
- 3rd Grade and up—half dozen instruments and use them most weeks.
- Have a signal for “Stop playing.”

- **Student Instrumentalists**

- Piano, violin, guitar, etc.
- Student should already know worship songs on their instrument.
- Practice with them ahead of time.
- Encourages young musicians to play in a worship setting and for the glory of God.

- **Multiple Age Groups Together in Worship**

- Find songs that have repeating phrases, echoes, or can be sung in a round.
- Give older children leadership roles with instruments, singing, reading, and sound and visual equipment.
- Include movement opportunities for younger children.
- Focus on one curriculum to organize your worship themes from week to week.

- **Roles for Children During the Worship Time**

- Reading or reciting scripture
- Leading hand motions and signing

- Playing instruments: rhythm instruments, drums, violins, etc.
- Operating sound and visual equipment
- Singing up front with the worship leader—individually or as a worship team

## A FEW FINAL REMARKS ABOUT PLANNING AND LEADING WORSHIP

1. Weave the worship time together with brief and reverent comments that direct the children’s attention to God.
2. Be careful not to talk too much.
3. Be open to making changes in your plans as the Holy Spirit leads.
4. Pray for God to do His work and to meet you as you worship together.

## FURTHER TRAINING

Visit [Truth78.org/training](https://truth78.org/training) to read other articles in the Core Training Series and browse conference sessions.

For further training on leading children in worship, we encourage you to listen to following seminar on our website:

- [Leading Children in God-Centered Worship](#)  
(Note: This seminar was produced under our previous name, *Children Desiring God*.)

### Endnotes

1. Piper, John., “Meditation on Daily Worship,” article published on December 1997, copyright Desiring God Foundation, [desiringGod.org](https://desiringGod.org).
2. Bridges, Jerry. *The Practice of Godliness—Godliness Has Value for All Things*. (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2016), 21.
3. Kaufflin, Bob. “One More Thought on Training Children to Worship God,” article published on March 31, 2006, copyright Worship Matters, [worshipmatters.com](https://worshipmatters.com).
4. Piper, John. “One Generation Shall Praise Your Works to Another,” sermon delivered on March 19, 2000 at Bethlehem Baptist Church of Minneapolis, copyright ©2013 Desiring God Foundation, [desiringGod.org](https://desiringGod.org).



Equipping the Next Generations  
to Know, Honor, and Treasure God

Truth78 is a vision-oriented ministry for the next generations—that they may know, honor, and treasure God, setting their hope in Christ alone, so that they will live as faithful disciples for the glory of God.

Our mission is to nurture the faith of the next generations by equipping the church and home with resources and training that instruct the mind, engage the heart, and influence the will through proclaiming the whole counsel of God.

We are committed to developing resources and training that are God-centered, Bible-saturated, Gospel-focused, Christ-exalting, Spirit-dependent, doctrinally grounded, and discipleship-oriented.

## RESOURCES AND TRAINING MATERIALS

Truth78 currently offers the following categories of resources and training materials:

### VISION-CASTING AND TRAINING

We offer a wide variety of booklets, video and audio seminars, articles, and other practical training resources that highlight and further expound our vision, mission, and values, as well as our educational philosophy and methodology. Many of these resources are freely distributed through our website. These resources and trainings serve to assist ministry leaders, volunteers, and parents in implementing Truth78's vision and mission in their churches and homes.

### CURRICULUM

We publish materials designed for formal Bible instruction. The scope and sequence of these materials reflects our commitment to teach children and youth the whole counsel of God over the course of their education. Materials include curricula for Sunday School, Midweek Bible programs, Backyard Bible Clubs or Vacation Bible School, and Intergenerational studies. Most of these materials can be adapted for use in Christian schools and education in the home.

### PARENTING AND FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

We have produced a variety of materials and training resources designed to help parents disciple their children. These include booklets, video presentations, family devotionals, children's books, articles, and other recommended resources.

Furthermore, our curricula include Growing in Faith Together (GIFT) Pages to help parents apply what is taught in the classroom to their child's daily experience in order to nurture faith.

### BIBLE MEMORY

Our Fighter Verses Bible memory program is designed to encourage churches, families, and individuals in the lifelong practice and love of Bible memory. The Fighter Verses program utilizes an easy-to-use Bible memory system with carefully chosen verses to help fight the fight of faith. For pre-readers, Foundation Verses features 76 key verses with simple images. Visit [FighterVerses.com](http://FighterVerses.com) for weekly devotionals and free memory aids. Download the Fighter Verses App for quizzes, songs, devotionals, review reminders and other helps.

For more information on any of these resources and training materials contact:

**Truth78.org • info@Truth78.org • 877.400.1414 • @Truth78org**