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TRAINING CHILDREN TO WORSHIP GOD

I. Whose job is it? Psalm 78:1-8

- A. Although parents are the ones primarily entrusted with leading their children in the instruction of the LORD and family worship, there is a broader call to the local church community to collectively lead and train the next generation

“We will not hide them from their children but tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.” (vs. 4)

- B. The writer of this particular Psalm, Asaph, is an example of both a father who led his children in worship and a leader who led the community in worship. Asaph wrote worship songs that both extolled God and reminded the people of all that God did

1. The theme of “telling coming generation” as directed by Asaph in Psalm 78 is itself a song! – The primary role of directing children in worship falls to their parents. As a leader in the context of children’s ministry your role is to support the parents in their primary work at home.
2. The focus of this seminar will primarily address the role of leading a corporate gathering of children to worship by means of singing to God

- C. Asaph understood that God intends for children to be affected by the telling of his glorious deeds

1. We will tell them so that they will know
 - a. “That the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children”
 - b. ..Though, “children” refers to offspring in a general sense it also refers to children in a literal sense
 - c. That is why song lyric content in our children’s ministry is so important. Notice the substantive difference in content between the two songs:

*This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

*Holy God, in love, became
Perfect man to bear my blame.
On the cross he took my sin,
By His death I live again. (The Gospel Song – Drew Jones)*

2. We tell them so that they will believe. “So that they should set their hope in God,”(verse 7)
 - a. We are partnering with parents for the salvation of the children every time we gather to instruct them. If the songs we sing and if the words we share are not clearly gospel we can’t hope to persuade them toward belief
 - b. We don’t do altar calls – We simply present the Gospel and allow the Spirit-empowered Gospel to draw them to faith
 - c. Expressive joy in the gospel message makes it believable to our children. A worship leader who truly displays the joy of the Lord in his whole being helps the children believe.

3. We tell them so that they will remember. “and not forget the works of the Lord.” There is no better way to memorize the wonders of God than by singing His truth in song. We want our children to remember that they might also one day pass these truths on to their children.

- D. This Psalm not only instructed Israel to teach their children but Asaph demonstrates this telling of the glorious works of the Lord in the second half of the Psalm. Psalm 78:13-16 (ESV) ‘He divided the sea and let them pass through it, and made the waters stand like a heap. In the daytime he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a fiery light. He split rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. He made streams come out of the rock and caused waters to flow down like rivers.

II. Can children really worship?

- A. All people are commanded to worship God. Both believers and unbelievers. We are always worshiping something. The better question to ask is, “What are our children worshiping?”
 1. Asaph received a psalm of thanksgiving from David very similar to Psalm 78. 1 Chronicles 16:8-36
 - a. “Make known his deeds among the peoples,” verse 8
 - b. “Remember the wondrous works that he has done . . .O offspring of Jacob” verses 12-13

2. Then David went on to call all people everywhere to worship God:
 - a. 1 Chron. 16:23-25 (ESV) "Sing to the Lord, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be held in awe above all gods."
 - b. "Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth"

- B. Parents are commanded to teach their children to worship God
 1. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" Deuteronomy 6:5-7
 2. "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" Proverbs 22:6

- C. Worship is not limited to praise but is the sum total of all we do in obedience to God
 1. The entire children's ministry experience in your church is to be an act of worship. 1 Cor. 10:31 (ESV) "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."
 2. Prayer, singing, reading of scripture, drama, instruction, order, safety, and care all bring glory to God and are a part of our Sunday morning children's worship.
 3. We need to be careful we don't leave the impression with our children that worship is narrowly defined as only singing praises

- D. Children should not be excluded from the call to worship simply because they are not regenerate or because they are immature
 1. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me." We need to make sure that we do not hinder a child's response to God even though many of the children are not yet regenerated
 2. When children imitate their parent's expressive worship it's a good thing as long as we don't point to those outward expressions as if they signaled genuine inward faith. Children can be commended for raising their hands for it is an appropriate response to God, however immature, unformed and untested, the understanding may be.

III. What is your job description?

Our main objective in singing with children should be instruction. We should call them to heart-worship while we teach them about God. We must not assume that children have accurate knowledge of God. Singing provides a wonderful opportunity to bring them the knowledge of the Lord with music. Instructive lyrics are increasingly grasped by the mind and received in the heart; those songs can become songs of genuine worship.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Colossians 3:16 (see also Eph. 5:18-20)

- A. Content, Content, Content! Consider carefully the words of the songs we choose for children
 - 1. We can teach out of the words of the songs. “And You’ve created me to worship You. And You’ve created me to love You. And You have made me to delight in You. All glory to Your name! (Almighty Creator, from *Awesome God*)
 - a. God created me and you. Psalm 139:13-16
 - b. We were created to delight in God. Sometimes we can love things more than God. (Candy, toys, sports, friends, etc)
 - c. If we love something more than God we are worshiping it. We worship what we most love. God created us to worship Him.
 - 2. Songs that magnify God’s character work better for instruction than songs which declare personal faith in Christ
 - a. “Almighty, Creator, You spoke and there was light, There was light. And by your great power, You spoke and there was day, and there was night. And You made all things to show Your glory. Formed all things to bring you praise.” (Almighty Creator – from *Awesome God*)
 - b. “Jesus, you came a servant, to do your father’s will. Through Satan’s worst temptations you were obedient still. You are the rock of ages, you are so faithful.” (Make Me Faithful, from *To Be Like Jesus*)
 - c. “Your love will last forever. It’s like a mighty river, That flows and flows forever, Never stopping.” (Your Love, from *Awesome God*)

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3. Be careful with songs which explicitly declare personal faith in Christ in the first person. They can be harder for the children to follow.
 - a. "As long as I have breath I will praise you, as long as my heart beats I will sing, as long as life flows in my veins, I will bless your name." (As Long As I Have Breath)
 - b. "Jesus my only hope, my only plea . . . Jesus I trust in you alone." (Jesus My Only Hope - Mark Altrogge)
 - c. We do not need to eliminate all songs of personal faith, for many of them contain the richest gospel content. Consider them evangelistic and speak to where the unbelieving children are. Ex. Amazing Grace.

 - B. Active, Active, Active! We should encourage expressive worship but not demand outward expression from our children.
 1. The scripture calls everyone to clap their hands to the Lord. We can feel comfortable doing the same thing. The call to worship God appropriately is universal. (Psalm 47:1)
 2. God is worthy of our praise and expressive worship. So we can encourage a group to lift their hands, shout or clap to God. We want our children to get comfortable lifting their hands in worship but don't want them to misunderstand what it signifies. For example:
 - a. We lift our hands to show that God is holy.
 - b. We don't lift our hands to show that we are holy or great.
 - c. We don't lift our hands to become holy.
 3. Call children to respond to God with their hearts, but don't set your expectations too high for their responsiveness or heart engagement in singing. Many of the children are not yet believers.
 - a. Don't refer to the children as Christians. Avoid false assurance.
 - b. Don't call for individual public declarations of faith. Children often respond positively just to please. If a child wants to repent and believe, let their parents know.

IV. Some Practical Suggestions

- A. Song selection – Enjoyable, Memorable, Simple.
 1. Songs which repeat are easier and often more fun to sing.
 - a. "Wait, Wait, Gotta Wait, Wait, Gotta Wait, Wait for the right time, your time, not mine!" (Gotta Wait, from *To Be Like Jesus*)

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- b. "I wanna be like you are, I want to be faithful. Help me to be like you are, O make me faithful." (Make Me Faithful, from *To Be Like Jesus*)
 2. Songs with the same theme can help the children learn. Three songs that speak about the grace of God, done in the same service, gives you multiple ways to communicate what grace means to the children.
 3. Avoid songs with lyrics that might confuse children. Lyrics like "Come thou fount of every blessing tune my heart to sing your praise," are not going to be easily grasped by children.
- B. Timing and breaks
1. Younger children do better with frequent breaks and change. Sing two songs then allow them to sit down. Use these breaks to teach the children. Children in a "TV" culture often have short attention spans.
 2. Consider interacting with the children as you teach about a particular song. They are less distracted when they are participating.
- C. Creativity in music and instruction.
1. Change the way you play a song – Children appreciate variety. Amazing Grace started slow but progressively moving to very fast can demonstrate both our reverent thankfulness and our excited celebration over what God has done for us.
 2. Tell stories – Stories can illustrate grace, salvation, adoption, covering of sin and other doctrinal truths.
 3. Change your voice. Drama is a great tool in capturing the attention of children. If you read a scripture change your voice when you speak the words of different characters. Whispering or speaking with a commanding voice capture your children's attention.
 4. Act out Bible characters
- D. Hand motions keep the children active and focused.
1. Make up your own hand motions if the ASL signing is too complicated for your song.
 2. Keep hand motions consistent if you have different leaders.
 3. Have adults up front lead the children. Have other children participate.
- E. Break up your singing with other expressions toward God.
1. Bible reading and instruction
 2. Dancing
 3. Drama
 4. Testimony
 5. Performance "Special songs"

V. How do the kid's take singing home?

- A. Provide songbooks to the parents with the words to the songs you use in children's ministry.
- B. Make cd's available of the songs you sing.
- C. Work with your worship leader from the main service to make sure you are doing some of the same songs they are.
- D. Repeat songs week to week and keep the overall number of songs you do in a season smaller to make sure the children get to know them by heart.

VI. After all the preparation and planning, who do we trust?

"There is a devotional preparation which every teacher should make before going to his class. He should go from the presence of God to his place of duty. Then his own heart will be set on fire at the flame of God's altar, and, looking into the face of Christ, he will receive his commission for the work before him." J. R. Miller

VII. Questions and Answers

http://www.covfel.org/pages/page.asp?page_id=44927

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Books:

"Family Worship: In the Bible, in History, and in Your Home" by Donald Whitney

"The A,B,C,D's of God" by Marty Machowski

"Worship Matters" by Bob Kauflin

CDs:

"To Be Like Jesus" Sovereign Grace Music

'Awesome God" Sovereign Grace Music

"Deliberate Kids" Phil Joel

"Hide Them In Your Heart" Steve Green

Websites:

<http://sojournkids.com/>

<http://www.childrendesiringgod.org/>

http://www.covfel.org/pages/page.asp?page_id=44927 (Promise Kingdom)

<http://www.covlife.org/ministries/children> (Discovery Land)