

DO YOUR CHILDREN'S SONGS MEASURE UP?

By Lorella Rouster

Topic: Choosing songs for children's ministry wisely

Last spring I began to seriously measure the Christian songs my children had been singing.

One of my daughter's friends accepted Christ at a pajama party at our home. She could not come to Sunday School, but was permitted to attend weekday club with us at our church. As we sang Christian songs on our way to club, I asked, "What Christian songs do you know, Marie?"

"I don't know any."

"Don't you know 'Jesus Loves Me?'" Every child knows "Jesus Loves Me," I thought.

No, I've never heard it." She didn't know any songs at all, and we had only a very short time each week for teaching. That's when I became really aware that our children's songs need some careful measuring.

What songs could we teach Marie in the car on our way to club that would be fun to sing yet would give her solid Biblical teaching? Since then I've been asking questions about the songs I select for junior church and vacation Bible school as well.

What makes a good song? A good Christian song must be good for something. I ask four questions of all the songs I teach, and only if I can answer with four unhesitating yeses do I use precious teaching time to teach or sing that song.

First, is the song fun or enjoyable to sing? Singing should be a pleasant experience with an easy, pleasant melody well within children's voice range. The more fun the song the better, provided it also passes the other three qualifications.

I find that many teachers ask only this question, but songs that are merely fun are at best a waste of time.

That being the case, does it teach? When our family taught Marie a song, I hoped it would teach her a little about God, the Christian life, or the meaning of salvation – something that would help her between club meetings.

Time is precious and may be more scanty than we realize. Children in class this week may never come again. Good stewardship demands singing songs that teach something.

Of course, the teaching must be Biblical. My children have learned some fun songs that I have had to discourage because I felt they gave the wrong impression, if not actual unbiblical teaching.

One song I've discouraged gives the impression that we get to heaven by not doing certain things. I think Christians ought to avoid these practices, but it's important to distinguish why we should avoid them. If I teach salvation by grace through faith and sing songs that teach or imply salvation by works, am I not working against my own purpose and confusing the children?

Last, the song must be understandable. Younger children often have difficulty in interpreting symbolism because they are literal-minded. Do they really understand what the fountain is in "Deep and Wide?" Could they comprehend it, even if *I explained it*?

Any song about a Biblical character or incident means much more when the singers know the story behind the song, so I choose such songs to go with current lessons or to review recent lessons.

Will the children understand the words? Words in King James English (thee, art, doth) may need explaining, depending on the children's ages and Biblical training.

Are the words pretty much in our natural sentence order, or are they inverted to produce rhyming lines or to imitate the King James Bible? Inversion of word order can be confusing to children. Of course, minor difficulties can be cleared up by explanation as the song is taught. You must judge whether or not your group will understand a song. Rote singing that does not touch the understanding is of little value.

I'm sold on the value of Biblically sound Christian music. Singing in church, Sunday School, vacation Bible school, club, or informal Christian gatherings is far, far more than a way to fill time. It's a teaching method that will stay with the child (or adult) probably longer than any spoken lesson. I advocate that all of us concerned with Christian education begin measuring our songs carefully.