

2.3 How can we use music, rhythm, and dance?

Why are singing and dancing important?

Singing and dancing are important in Sunday school because:

- Songs bring courage, encouragement, and joy to the human spirit. When people are joyful, they often feel the urge to sing and dance as an expression of their happiness. When people feel sad, they can often feel better again by singing. We want our worship to be full of joy, so we sing and dance to encourage a joyful spirit.
- People get tired. It is hard to sit still and be quiet. When we sing and dance, it takes away the tired feeling and renews our strength. Our bodies receive new energy.
- Singing and dancing attract people. People are naturally drawn to any site from which joyful songs are heard.
- Singing and dancing are excellent teaching methods. People learn easily from songs because of the repetition, and because they are so enjoyable, that we let our guard down and open ourselves up to receiving new ideas.
- Finally, but probably most important, singing and dancing are God-approved ways to honor Him. We people like music a lot, so we can understand that God likes it, too. From ancient times, music has been a part of the worship of God’s people (think about Psalm 150). In the Old Testament, God commanded His people to sing and dance in praise to Him.

What must we sing? (Ephesians 5:19)

.....

What should we do in our dancing? (Psalms 149:3, 150:4)

.....

When God brought His people through a time of great trouble, how did they praise Him?
(Exodus 15:20-21)

.....

Songs can also be good teachers. It is not true that all teaching must be done through the Bible lesson alone. If we choose good songs, they can be teaching all the time that people are singing. For example, one doctrinal problem we have seen in some countries of Africa concerns baptism. Many people’s thinking is mixed up because of the unbiblical teaching of some prominent churches. Many people think they became Christians by getting baptized. The Bible tells us that a person can be saved only by trusting Jesus Christ in his heart. Those who have trusted Jesus are already believers. Baptism shows others publicly that one has decided to follow Jesus. We at Every Child Ministries have written a song to set forth the true Bible teaching and to correct the unbiblical teaching. These are the words to the song:

Getting baptized will not save you! It just shows people that you are saved.

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Getting baptized will not save you! Only Jesus alone can save you!

(Song originally written in the African Kituba language of Congo, adapted to English)

Every time we sing that song, we are reinforcing Biblical teaching both about baptism and about salvation.

Teaching that is received through songs is likely to be remembered because it is repeated over and over, and in such an enjoyable manner. It is likely to reach the heart, because songs have a way of helping people to lower their defenses so that new ideas can get into their hearts and minds.

Teaching that is received through songs will be spread far and wide, as children sing in their homes, women in the fields and marketplace, and men on the forest paths and in the village and town. Many others will hear the teaching that is given in songs. For these reasons, we believe that singing and dancing should have a prominent and permanent place in the Sunday school.

It is important to plan the songs you will sing in Sunday school.

Often here in Africa, the song leaders do not have any plan for the song time. They just sing whatever pops into their mind, or they just sing certain favorites over and over. However, in Sunday school it is preferable to plan the songs ahead of time. This allows the leader to choose the best and most appropriate songs, and ones that will reinforce the aim of the lesson. He can still add or leave out a song as the Holy Spirit prompts him, but overall, quality will be improved.

How to choose good songs:

Good songs for Sunday school have these characteristics:

- Children like to sing them because they make them feel good.
- They are not hard to sing.
- They are lively songs with a strong rhythmic beat.
- They teach correct Biblical doctrine, with no error mixed in.
- They reinforce the aim of the lesson aim for the day.
- They can be used to introduce various standard parts of the Sunday school program: Offering, Prayer, Bible Lesson, etc.
- They prepare the children to eventually participate in the adult worship service.

Now let's think about these characteristics one by one.

- **Good Sunday school songs are those children like to sing because they make them feel good.**

As soon as you gain much experience in songleading, you will easily understand that even though children will sing almost any song, some will be their favorites that they will always want to sing. These songs make them feel good, happy. These are the songs they will go out of Sunday school singing. They will sing them all week long, in their homes, at school and as they walk from place to place. Whenever you choose songs for Sunday school, it's good to choose a few of their favorites.

Now think. Amongst all the songs you know, which ones do children like to sing the best? Write the names of some of their favorites here:

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- **Good Sunday school songs are not hard to sing.**

Sometimes you will hear a choir sing songs that sound beautiful, but they do not go over very well in Sunday school. This is usually because the song is not easy for the children to sing. The music may go too high or too low for the children’s voices.

Either the words or the music may be too complicated and difficult for the children to follow. It may depend on singing parts that require special practice. Every song does not necessarily make a good Sunday school song. Songs for Sunday school should not be too hard for the children to sing.

Now think. Amongst all the songs you have heard different choirs sing, can you give one example of a song that was hard for the children to sing? If so, think again. What made the song difficult for the children? Write your response here:

.....

Can you give an example of a good song that is not hard for the children to sing? What is it that makes this song easy to sing?

.....

- **Good Sunday school songs are lively with a strong rhythmic beat.**

Children are drawn to songs that make them feel like dancing. When a song makes them feel like bouncing, clapping, nodding their heads, or dancing, we say it has a strong rhythmic beat. An example of a song that has a strong rhythmic beat is “Do Lord.”

Now think. What Christian songs do you know that have a strong rhythmic beat? Write some down on the line below. These are songs you should consider singing in Sunday school.

- **Good Sunday school songs teach correct Biblical doctrine, with no error mixed in.**

From time to time I (Mama Lorella) have heard a church choir sing a song that sounded religious, but presented ideas and teachings that were not in line with what the Bible says. Here in Africa, choirs from all kinds of different churches sing in our towns and villages. When people hear them, they may like the sound or the rhythm or the enthusiasm of the singers, so without thinking about what they are singing, they learn the song and start singing it, too. But the hard part is that they have not realized that what they are singing in really unbiblical doctrine. It is error.

For example, I have often heard choirs sing that the works a person does will each save him or condemn him. This teaching is not in line with many verses and passages of the Bible that insist that we cannot be saved by good works, but only by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:1-14, Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5). Another time, I heard a choir sing through the Ten Commandments, leaving out “You shall not make any carved image... you shall not bow down to them or serve them” (Exodus 20:4-5, the second commandment).

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You must be careful about repeating every song you hear sung. Ask yourself, Would I teach this in my church? If you would not teach it, then why would you sing it in Sunday school?

Now think. Are there some songs you have heard that sound religious but are not really in agreement with Bible teaching?

Write those songs on the line below:

.....

What can you do if you hear a song that has a beautiful melody and good rhythm, but has some error in its teaching? It may be possible to change some of the words to the song in order to correct its teaching, or to add some additional lines or verses. For instance, the song about the Ten Commandments could be salvaged by adding a verse about the second commandment. Or, it may be possible to use the music, but put entirely different words to the music. I have done this with many English songs. If none of these ideas work, it would be best to forget about that song—not to sing it at all in Sunday school.

Think about one of the songs you wrote down on the line above. Could you change some of the words to correct the teaching? Or could you add some additional words? On the line below, see if you can correct the song. Then trying singing it.

.....

• **Good Sunday school songs reinforce the lesson aim for the day.**

Every Bible lesson will have a lesson aim—a main point or teaching you will try to impress on the class. When you plan the Sunday school program, every part of it should reinforce the lesson aim for the day, including the songs the children will sing.

For example, if the lesson aim for the day is *Stop Lying*, we should choose some songs that talk about lying, or at least about a closely related subject—the *mouth* or the *Christian’s speech*.

There are many songs from which to choose that have this theme. Some are:

Oh be careful little *mouth*, *what you say!*

All for Jesus, all for Jesus (all my thoughts and *words* and doings)

Praise Him! Praise Him! (A good way to use your mouth)

Tell It to Jesus (Another good way to use your mouth)

Write down some other songs you know that would reinforce the lesson aim, *Stop Lying*:

.....

Every lesson will have a lesson aim. When you plan the Sunday school program, you should always choose some songs that will reinforce the lesson aim for the day. Here is a list of some



possible lesson aims. After each lesson aim, write two songs that could reinforce the aim for the day:

Lesson aim: Pray to God in times of trouble, because God is honored when we seek His help.

1.
2.

Lesson aim: Honor your father and your mother, because this pleases God.

1.
2.

Lesson aim: God wants all our prayers, so we must pray only to Him, not to any other.

1.
2.

Lesson aim: Do not steal, for this pleases God.

1.
2.

Lesson aim: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

1.
2.

Lesson aim: Do not complain, but be content with what God gives you.

1.
2.

Lesson aim: God wants to help us, so ask for His help.

1.
2.

Lesson aim: Jesus is the friend of children, so children should love Him.

1.
2.

Lesson aim: Believers should be baptized in water, so if you are a believer and haven't yet been baptized, you should do so.

1.

2.

- **Songs can be used to introduce various standard parts of the Sunday school program.**

It is a good idea to choose one song to use every week to introduce certain parts of the Sunday school program. For example, choose a song about prayer to introduce prayer time each week. Once the children are used to this system, you no longer need to announce that it's time for prayer. Just start singing the prayer time as an introduction, and go right into the prayer time.

Now think. Think about songs that you might use to introduce the Bible lesson every week. Write down some ideas here:

.....

- **Good Sunday school songs help to prepare the children to eventually participate in the adult worship service.**

It's fine for the children to sing their own Sunday school songs, but they should also learn some of the hymns that are most often used in your church services. Then as they grow older and begin to participate in the adult services, they will feel comfortable with at least some of the songs that are used.

Get together with someone else from your church. Together, list the six songs you think the adults sing the most:

.....
.....
.....

You should probably choose at least one of these songs to begin teaching the children. Which song will you teach first in Sunday school?

.....

Why?.....

You can write songs for your own Sunday school!

If you do not know or cannot find a song for some specific purpose, you can write your own song. You can experiment at home, making up your own words and melody. If you are new at this, begin with a short, simple song that is easy to sing. Once you know it well, try teaching it to your own children at home, or to a relative's or neighbor's children. This will easily show you whether your song will be easy for the children to sing, and whether they will like it.

Did you have a hard time coming up with two songs for some of the lesson aims we wrote? If you were not able to think of songs for one or more of the lesson aims, try writing a song to teach



the truth of that lesson. Write down the words below. Then try putting a melody to the words. Sing it for someone near you, and try teaching it to him.

Your own song:

How should you lead songs?

We have considered how to choose good songs. Now let’s talk about leading those songs in Sunday school. Here are some important principles:

- **Know the song well yourself before leading it publicly.**
Before you try to lead any song publicly, you should know the song very well yourself—both the words and the music. If you want to use a song you don’t know very well, commit yourself to learning it before class time. You can do this by listening to it and singing it over and over at home for several days before you need to lead it publicly. You can practice leading it or teaching it to others by practicing with your own children or other small groups nearby. If you cannot do this, you could ask someone else to lead the song—someone who knows it well.
- **Get the children participating as much as possible.**
Children love to participate, so the more active they can be, the better! Here are some ideas: If you are using a song that talks about Jesus doing miracles, you could ask some of the children to stand up one by one and tell in a few words what great things God has done for them. If you are using a song that talks about Satan fleeing, you could ask any who feel that Satan has a hold on them to stand up. Then other children nearby could hold out their hands toward them and pray for them. If they are singing a song of praise to God, they may follow it with a time of verbal praise. Or, the girls might sing the song of praise while the boys praise God in words, then the other way around.

Think about adding special actions to the songs. Don’t be shy about having the children use their whole bodies. You can also choreograph certain dance steps or actions, or allow free dancing expression as the children sing. You can have them sway, swing their arms, nod their heads, clap their hands, stomp their feet, or whatever seems appropriate to the song and the mood of your own local church.

- **Lead the songs with great enthusiasm.**

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Remember that you are the leader and the children will follow you. Sing with enthusiasm. Show appropriate emotion. Use your whole body show motion and rhythm. If you show enthusiasm, the children will do their best to sing any song, even a new one that they don't yet have great confidence in.

• **Teach new songs gradually.**

If you want to teach the children a new song, it is best to do it gradually. Begin by letting them hear it sung, then let them try the chorus. Depending on the length and complexity of the song, teach it little by little. You might take several weeks to teach a hymn, especially if it has several verses. Review the new song each week and add a little more so that the children gradually become comfortable with it. Then continue to sing the new song from time to time so that it will be impressed on their memories.

• **All the songs need not be concentrated in one “song time”. They are better scattered throughout the program and even perhaps throughout the Bible lesson.**

Not like this:

- Song
- Song
- Song
- Song
- Teaching
- Teaching
- Teaching
- Teaching

But like this:

- Song
- A little teaching
- Song
- A little teaching
- Song
- A little teaching
- Song
- A little teaching

• **Show a spirit of worship when singing songs of praise and worship.**

We sing songs of praise for God to hear. When we sing songs of praise, we should show an attitude of praise, adoration and worship. The song leader sets the tone by his example.

LET'S REVIEW

What are some characteristics of good Sunday school songs?

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-
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QUIZ Finish the following statements:

Before you lead songs you should

_____.

If you want to use a song but you don't know it very well, what could you do? You could

_____, or you could

_____.

The song leader should lead songs with great _____.

All the songs do not need to be concentrated in _____ part of the program.
They are better scattered

_____ the program.

How should a new song be introduced? _____

In introducing a new song, what part of the song should you begin with?

If you like the way a song sounds, but its teaching is in error, what can you do? You can

_____, or

_____, or

_____.

If the teacher cannot find a song that reinforces the lesson aim, what can he do?

When leading songs, the teacher should use what part of his body?

OBSERVATION

Watch carefully when someone else is leading songs. What is good about the way he is doing it?

In what ways could his song leading be improved?

How could he show greater enthusiasm?
