



# Songs for Everyone

## Paying attention to what we sing together



**Becky Drake** explores how we can encounter God across the generations in sung worship. Together with her husband Nick, she founded Worship for Everyone, an intergenerational ministry resourcing churches, schools and homes with music and training.

### Music can powerfully unite or drastically divide!

When we gather in all-age worship, our songs enable us to sing the same words and the same melody together. If we also have actions accompanying the song, we even unite with our bodies as well! As we sing, our attention shifts to Jesus, and we unite as one family around the God we love and worship!

This is the goal in an ideal world! However, many of us will have been in times of intergenerational worship, where most of the adults look disengaged, teenagers seem awkward, and the littlest children aren't keeping up with the song. It's easy to feel that all-age worship divides the church rather than bringing it together.

Many years ago, when my husband and I were first leading worship in our local church, we clocked that our times of all-age worship seemed to cater well for pre-school children but didn't unite the whole room. We soon realised that if we wanted to keep the children engaged but also facilitate meaningful times of worship for our older congregation members, we needed to pay attention to the songs we were using. This led us to ultimately begin writing songs specifically with the goal of uniting the generations – and here we are 20 years later, still writing, resourcing the wider church, and utterly convinced that with the right songs and effective leadership, there's nothing more powerful than every age group in the room together, worshipping God side by side!

So, practically, how do you go about selecting the right songs that will engage everyone?

### Think about lyrics

Firstly, think carefully about the themes and words of the songs you select. Lyrics like 'Tiny little me loves Jesus' will work brilliantly in a toddler group, but aren't helpful for corporate worship where everyone is present! Equally, phrases like 'salvation by grace' or 'king of righteousness' are wonderfully rich for mature Christians, but will leave young children looking confused as they try to read and interpret these long words.

Aim for simple lyrics, but that doesn't mean you'll sacrifice depth; singing about God's love, his strength, his friendship (the list goes on!) are simple but deeply meaningful themes that everyone can access.

**“...there's nothing more powerful than every age group in the room together, worshipping God side by side!”**

### Pick the right key

The same goes for melodies. Practically speaking, children thrive singing within an octave range from middle C upwards. You don't have to be too strict about this, and the odd passing note will be fine, but if a song is particularly low or high or does lots of vocal gymnastics, once again, younger children will struggle to keep up (to be honest most adults will too!). Simple doesn't have to mean dull or too repetitive. One of our values as songwriters is to create music that moves the heart, which I totally believe is one of music's God-given purposes: to access our emotions and to speak to our souls. So, having a wide range of melodies – some fast, some slow, some joyful and some reflective, will also aid your times of all-age worship. Many churches favour an upbeat song or two when children are in the room, and rarely venture away from this kind of style and tempo. We have found that variety is crucial in keeping all the ages engaged and leading beyond the 'token all-age moment' and towards a more meaningful encounter with God. For example, one of our songs, 'As we wait', was written specifically to facilitate a quiet moment of waiting on the Holy Spirit. We have experienced so many beautiful moments of worship with children and adults together while using this song.

**“...one of music's God-given purposes: to access our emotions and to speak to our souls.”**

## More than one song

Linked to this, another tip for engaging everyone is to extend the time of worshipping together – even if it's just a very small extension. The vast majority of churches only have children in worship for one song at the start of a service. If that's you, then it's a great start – there's definitely an intergenerational value in your church! The only problem with one song is that it easily becomes a token moment in the gathering, and it's hard to move towards more variety, as typically a church will want to open with praise and a more upbeat opening song. By moving towards having two songs together, with a little bit of flow, you can journey from praise to intimacy or reflection more easily, which is such an important part of worship to model to our children.

Worshipping God isn't only about dancing and praising (although that's important!), it's also a chance for everyone to connect with their Father, bring their worries, open their hearts and be filled again with the Holy Spirit's love and power.



## Add a simple chorus

One thing we often do at the end of an all-age song is add on a simple chorus of an adult song. A chorus like 'Here I am to Worship' or 'How Great is our God' are so simple and singable, and will help to keep adults engaged, while also allowing a bit more space to lead children into God's presence. You could play one of these choruses instrumentally and invite everyone to quietly close their eyes and pray as the music plays. This will disciple the whole room to use the worship time to connect directly with God. It models that our sung worship isn't only singing the words corporately, but it's a chance to personally respond to our Father in heaven as well.

## Explain why we sing

It can really help to aid engagement across the room if the worship leader takes time to speak and explain what's happening. If you imagine you're leading a room of non-Christians in worship, you'll avoid jargon and ensure everyone knows what is going on! Plan a few things you might say, for example, explain why we sing – that it makes God happy, it helps us to unite, that we remember how wonderful God is, etc. Once everyone knows why we sing, it can help participation.

## Use your body


I also use my hands often to lead others. For example, I might ask the room to stretch their arms up high and explain how this motion can help us to remember how high and great God is! Or, I might ask them to gently put out their hands in front of them as a way of saying 'Here I am God, I am yours'. At other times I invite everyone to put their hands on their hearts, and I lead a prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to fill everyone with his love today. So, speaking outside of the songs can really help to sustain engagement and lead people into a deeper understanding of what worship is for.

## Action songs?

Finally, this leads us to consider actions! Do you like them or hate them? Usually, actions are a bit like Marmite! There's no hard and fast rule – some contexts will work beautifully with actions and others will struggle. I love using them because I believe that it models to the church the importance of using our whole selves – body as well as voice – in worship and enables children who can't yet read to access the worship more easily. If you're leading a church that is resistant to actions, you may need to spend a moment sharing vision on some of this! Remind them of the countless ways David uses his body in the Psalms as he praised by bowing down, clapping, and undignified dancing! Remind them that sometimes we do this for the sake of our little ones – so that we can all unite even if they can't read yet. We would always advocate for having an action leader at the front to lead the way and give confidence. You can't blame people for not joining in if they've no idea what the actions are!

Whatever your context and however well (or not well!) things are currently going, the wonderful truth is that God is all about unity. Even if it's a bit of an uphill struggle, it's so worth investing in your all-age singing, because it's on God's heart and it glorifies him when every age sings together! So, keep going, try something new, pray for God's Spirit to be poured out as you serve him, and we hope you feel hugely encouraged as you grow in this area!

## Find out more

- For all Becky's song resources, and to access online training, go to [www.worshipforeveryone.com](http://www.worshipforeveryone.com). If you are working in schools or taking assemblies, check out [www.songsforschool.com](http://www.songsforschool.com) for more songs. All lyric videos can be found via YouTube, search: Worship for Everyone.
-  Becky and Melanie discuss intergenerational worship on the Roots for churches podcast: [rootsforchurches.podbean.com](http://rootsforchurches.podbean.com)