

CHANGING

 the way 

WE THINK

 about 

PRIMARY

 **MUSIC** 

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1

Introduction

YOU PULL INTO THE CHURCH PARKING LOT SUNDAY MORNING AND GO for the best spot: the one closest to the door. Another car almost beats you there, and for a moment you both stay half-in and half-out of the desired spot. It's a stale mate, neither of you wanting to back down.

But then you glance at the other driver and recognition sets in. You see the crazed look in their eyes that comes from staying up until 2 a.m. the night before, see the self-paid and home-made stacks of posters and props that are shoved in their backseat.

That's when you realize. This spot? It isn't for you.

It's for the primary chorister.

You hurriedly pull away, not wanting the crazed look in their eyes to be targeted at you for one moment longer.

You say a quick prayer for that overworked, tired soul. Of course, the chorister in question has probably been praying for their soul since the day they were called.

The chorister feels the weight of being the main teacher and entertainer for all the sweet kids in your ward and often wonders if they are even doing a good job. But honestly, their biggest worry is that they aren't reaching the kids; that at the end of the day, the children won't feel the Spirit, learn the words to the songs, or enjoy their time in class.

So, what do they do? Every chorister approaches their calling differently. While some go in with a good outline, others struggle to plan lessons. Many dive into creative crafts and games that are fun, but have nothing to do with the gospel. Others throw song after song at the kids without explanation or connections.

If you are looking for a way for the kids to have fun while still making gospel connections, I'd like to propose a different way of looking at Primary music.

Ditch the stress of having the perfect-looking lesson, help the kids grow their testimonies through song, and create a class where the kids not only feel the Spirit, but can connect it to the principles they are learning.

This book teaches choristers how to refocus on the gospel and help kids build testimonies by doing three things: 1) Helping the kids connect to the message of the songs so that in times of hardship they can lean on the things they learned. 2) Providing the kids a simple, hands-on activity to help them engage with the gospel topics they are singing about. 3) Giving every single kid a chance to participate in the activity every single week.

I've had other choristers use some of my tips and lesson plans and also get great results. The following techniques may not work for everyone, but if they lower the stress level of even one chorister and focus their work on the gospel, then they have succeeded.

In this book we will discuss:

- The three goals of a successful singing time: testimony, connection, and participation.
- Making the gospel the focus of singing time and how to tweak those cutesy lessons we all love so that they testify of Christ.
- How to help kids connect to the music and use these songs as testimony building blocks.
- Ways to include every kid in every lesson.
- Giving the kids hands-on experience with the principles you're teaching.
- Tips for making lesson prep and teaching simple, along with lesson examples.

Is there such thing as a perfect primary music leader? No.

However, there is definitely such a thing as the perfect music leader for your primary. There are tons of music leaders out there with fantastic ideas, but you know what? They weren't called to teach music to the kids in your ward. Nope. You were the one called to teach music to the kids in your ward. With your prayers, your heart, and your talents (the ones you know about and the ones you don't), you can find a system and teaching technique that both you and the kids enjoy.

Just as there are no two identical testimonies, there are no two identical music leaders. You will be successful if you focus on helping the children to develop their own testimonies and connections to gospel music.

Want to have faith-filled lessons that are both fun and engaging? Then join me in the next chapter.

2 Getting Back to the Point

BEFORE I TELL YOU MY EPIC STRATEGY I HAVE A FEW CONFESSIONS TO make. I have never used a flip chart. I know, scandalous. I've never cut off the bishop's tie, I've never played singing time measles, and I actually detest the popsicle stick system for choosing volunteers.

Now, before you think of me as a radical, I'd like to point out that I don't think these things are bad. In fact, some of my favorite music leaders use these tools all the time. So why don't I use these and other cute ideas? Two reasons. First, it's just not my style. It's ok to have your own unique approach to teaching primary music. You don't have to follow the popular trends or do what the last music leader did to be successful.

Second, cute things are only amazing if they add to the gospel learning and not take its place. Later on, I'll share some ideas on how to tweak those cute, tried-and-true lessons to testify of the gospel. I'll also share some of the activities I have done and examples of how to make the gospel the star of your lesson.

Every time you prepare a lesson that includes an activity, think to yourself: Why am I doing this particular activity? Is there a point to this? Will this activity be a good thing for the children in my ward? Will doing this help the kids to feel God's love or understand a part of His gospel?

I personally don't include anything in my singing time lessons if it doesn't a) have Gospel value or b) have musical value. I think there is definitely something to say about the value of fun. However, if all of your activities are purely for fun and don't have any gospel or musical value, then what is the point?

I'll give you a great example. There is a popular activity where the music leader brings up a kid to stir seemingly white powder into a glass of water. The kid is surprised when the water turns a different color. Whatever color it turns to then corresponds with a song that you'll sing next. On the one hand this is plain old fun, though it doesn't give very many volunteer opportunities, which I'll talk about in a moment. But does this activity have gospel or musical value? Maybe. You could argue that it helps you review the songs. But by itself, this is a fluff activity.

My suggestion is to transform lessons like the colorful water lesson into something that is not only fun, but can be an example of a gospel principle. For example, if I were to do this same lesson, I might do it while teaching a song about kindness or sharing testimonies. I would tell the children that sharing our testimonies can bring a special happiness to others and help them feel the love of our Savior. Stirring in the white powder would represent sharing our testimonies or being kind and the water turning an exciting color would show the effect that has on others. The experiment would hopefully take on deeper meaning for them. Same activity, different purpose.

Don't use up your precious time with anything you would classify as meaningless. Is it bad to do the colorful water activity? Absolutely not. But make a purposeful decision

about how the activity will be used in your primary.

There are several fantastic ideas out there to help you come up with cute lesson plans if that is your personal interest. The kids often love these, and that's great. I'm not going to list these tried-and-true activities in this book, because a simple search for primary chorister social media pages will give you more than you could ever use. However, don't let cute lesson plans take the place of gospel learning. If you are teaching with fluff and ignoring the strong lessons you could be sharing with the primary kids, then you are missing an opportunity.

I've always approached primary this way, whether I was teaching in the classroom or being the chorister, but getting sent home from church during the COVID pandemic brought home the importance of using my time wisely. I remember panicking and thinking: What if I'm released before they let us come back to church? Will I feel like I've squandered my time or will I feel like I've done my best to share God's love with these little ones?

Ask yourself: If I have only one more week, one last chance to teach these kids something, what should it be? If I have just one opportunity to help them gain a stronger testimony, what should I do?

Make sure the activities you do have a point as strong as the songs you are teaching.

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