
Introduction

Welcome to *A Year of Beautiful Singing!* This resource is designed with you in mind - the part-time staffer, the volunteer director, the full-time staff member wearing many hats - one who has a large heart for the benefit and value of the church children's choir but limited time to devote to making it great. Hopefully you will find that all the tools you need for success are together in one place: exercises for building vocal skill, visual resources for improving memory and recall, ideas for extending learning for older children and streamlining presentation for younger children, plans for sharing the pedagogical process with parents and church members, and information children need to participate fully as worship leaders. Add a roll of tape, invest a little time learning the songs yourself, and you have what you need for a beneficial choir year.

If you've never done this before, open the plan and away we go. If you already have a supply of vocal exercises or games that work well for you, feel empowered to substitute those materials or incorporate them into what's inside. Tailor this resource to fit your needs and teaching style.

Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote, "I am a part of all that I have met."¹ Certainly, this is true for any good teacher. Teaching skills and ideas are absorbed from many places. I am a part of all that I have met - all of the master teachers I have watched, all of the resources I have read - some names you would recognize and others you would not know. People like my mother who taught by example to always be eye-level with a three-year-old when you speak to them. People like my college professor who drilled into me the value of clear conducting and succinct speech in rehearsal - showing more than telling. People like my husband, Kenney Potter, whose research taught me how to order the voice-building sequence for the greatest success. Colleagues like Judy Britts, Amanda Page Smith, Andrea Baxter, Karol Kimmell, and Emily Floyd with whom I have brainstormed and discussed and worked out rehearsal strategies. You will certainly hear overtones of Helen Kemp, Anton Armstrong, Madeline Bridges, Michael Hawn. You might catch a quick glimpse of John Feierabend or Rollo Dilworth. It is with gratitude to these who have taught me that I offer these ideas to you. So many of the things I have learned have been with me for many years and have been incorporated thoroughly into my style, making it difficult to give complete credit for the original idea. Hopefully, things have been made mine in a way that gives a fresh spin. Take and use and pass them on.

- Heather Potter

¹ Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses," in *Poems* (London: Edward Moxon, 1842).

Curriculum Contents, Overview, and Materials

Lesson 1-24.....	4
Appendix 1.....	52
Appendix 2.....	58
Hymn Pages	67
Sharing Service Outline.....	70

A Year of Beautiful Singing (Volume 1: Let's Sing!) is designed to support the learning of the following choral literature for unison/two-part treble voices:

CGA640	Oh, Sing to the Lord arranged by Harriet Ziegenhals
CGA878	The Lord Is My Light by Michael Bedford
CGA1162	Light of Light by Nancy Gifford
CGA1172	The Heavens Declare the Glory of God by James Brighton
CGA1222	This Is the Day by Mark Burrows
CGA1453	The Lord Is Risen! (He Is Risen Indeed!) by Helen Kemp
CGA1753	May God Bless Us and Keep Us by Katie Houts
CGAMB103	Behold, I Have Loved You by Robin Wolaver

The purchase of this curriculum does not include permission to photocopy the anthems listed above.

It is our hope that some of these tried-and-true pieces may already be in your music library. Visit choristersguild.org or contact your local sheet music supplier to purchase these anthems for your choir.

This curriculum also incorporates three public domain hymns:

**Now Thank We All Our God
Many and Great, O God
Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee**

Included in the curriculum package are the following visual aids:

Set of Eight (8) Scripture Posters
Psalm 105 Chant
Stretch Prayer
Handbell Poster for **May God Bless Us and Keep Us**
Solfege Elevator
Set of Nine (9) Technique/Text Visuals

Additional items not provided in this resource but referenced in rehearsal activities:

Class set of kazoo's	Any star-shaped object
Class set of shakers	Soft ball for tossing
Class set of ribbons	Frisbee
Class set of jingle bells	Breathing ball
Toy microphone (or alternative)	Blank index cards
Images of sun/moon/stars/heavens/day/night	

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Focus on Singing

Invite children to mirror your movements as you lead the **Stretch Prayer** (see Appendix 1).

Inhale as if filling an inner tube around the waist. Release as if exhaling through a drinking straw.

Reverse the movements of the **Stretch Prayer**, returning to prayer hands. Twist right as you exhale and smile. Return to center on an inhale. Twist left as you exhale and smile.

Establish a slow 6/8 meter, alternating left and right heels on beats 1 and 4. Add hand movements to emphasize these beats. Maintain this movement as you introduce **Psalm 105** speech chant (see Appendix 1).

Maintain movement and invite singers to repeat the first line of the chant several times. Add a scoop into the first word.

Echo these sounds on a long, slow slide from high to low:

Ah!

A-ha!

Echo the following words from **May God Bless Us and Keep Us**, modeling a tall [ah] vowel:

God

us

again

Encourage singers to follow the directions as you sing **The Posture Song** (see Appendix 1). After you sing, prompt singers to recall posture specifics from the song. If you have an artist in the group, you could invite them to illustrate the elements of body position.



Objectives

1. Establish rehearsal process
2. Demonstrate correct singing posture
3. Identify scripture as source of song text
4. Isolate the speaking and singing voices

Lesson 1

May God Bless Us and Keep Us

1. Draw attention to question #1 written on the board (see **Materials and Rehearsal Preparation** on the following page). Ask singers to think about their response as you sing. Each time you model, be mindful of singing legato 4-measure phrases and using tall vowels. After you sing, gather responses to the question and listen for consensus. Does anyone think this song belongs at the end of a service?
2. Draw attention to question #2 and ask them to consider this question as you sing again. Gather responses and listen for consensus. Does anyone think the song is a prayer? Scripture setting is also a possible answer because the beginning does quote Numbers 6:24.
3. Tell the children, "This text is an example of a benediction, or blessing, that often ends our worship services—sometimes it uses this exact verse: *The Lord bless you and keep you.*"
4. Ask them to listen for who we are asking God to bless. Sing the song once more. List the people for whom we are asking God's blessings (don't forget "us"!).
5. ✦ Look at the music and ask singers to put their finger under the first word. Ask: "What is the third word we sing?"
6. Encourage children to use their tall singer posture and sing the song with you, tracking the text with their finger. Echo-sing phrases of text to get it memorized as quickly as possible and pay attention to accurate pitches and rhythms. Show with your gesture the long phrases, but don't linger on this skill today.
7. Tell the children, "We will sing this song again to close our rehearsal—as a benediction."



Children need guided practice the first time they hold a score. We will incorporate that into rehearsal in a few weeks, but for now, try to get them looking at and absorbing the text as quickly as possible. Identifying the third word (*bless*) will help them learn how to move their eyes down the page.

This Is the Day

1. Invite a volunteer to locate Psalm 118:24 on the wall and read it aloud.

2. Point to the text and invite the group to read it aloud in unison.
3. ✨ Ask the singers to listen as you share this verse in a different way. Sing the opening section with the claps as indicated. Invite them to join you in doing what you do with your hands. Do not add the stomp yet.
4. Invite singers to echo as you sing and clap the phrases of m11-15.
5. Sing once more and add the stomp in m14. Ask singers to add the stomp as they repeat m11-15. Repeat once more, if needed, to secure the melody, text, and body percussion. Tell them this is now their part—you will not sing it.
6. Start at the beginning of the A section (m5). Drop out at m11 and let the children finish the section on their own.
7. Tell them you will add a hand movement as you sing again. Encourage them to try to catch it and join you. Add a snap on the rests in measures 6, 8, and 10. These snaps should occur simultaneously with your consonant cut-offs (made, it).
8. Invite them to join you in singing, snapping, clapping, and stomping. Add the piano introduction and accompaniment. Without pausing after m15, continue through the entire song. You sing the new sections on pages 3-4 and 5-6 and invite them to re-enter on the return of the A section at m27 and m57. You sing the final phrase on page 7. (Note: This is rote singing—no score needed yet.)
9. Congratulate the children on singing the first full song of the year!



Be sure to clap as you desire it to appear in the final version. Consider placement of the hands (by ear, in center front of body, in front of face, etc.) Encourage children to clap with energy.

Teach the song **I Use My Lips** (see *Appendix 1*).

Close by speaking together the **Singer's Benediction** (see *Appendix 1*) and singing **May God Bless Us and Keep Us**.

Materials and Preparation



Affix to the wall (these should remain visible throughout the choir year):

All **Scripture posters**
Stretch Prayer
Psalm 105 speech chant
Singer's Benediction

Write on dry erase board or poster board:

1. If you were programming this song in worship, when in the service would we sing it?
2. How would you categorize this song? (prayer, praise, scripture setting, confession, other)

Expanding or Contracting



Expand

Toss a small, soft ball to individuals who introduce themselves and toss it back.

Add a hymn to rehearsal.

Contract

Psalm 105: Concentrate on maintaining the steady beat while listening to you speak one time only.

May God Bless Us and Keep Us: Teach only the first and last phrases. Make them responsible for these phrases and you sing remainder of blessing.

This Is the Day: Teach only the refrain. Do not sing entire song tonight.

Notes for Next Week





Focus on Singing

Invite children to mirror your movements as you lead the **Stretch Prayer**.

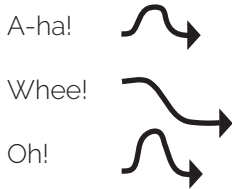
Inhale as if filling an inner tube around the waist. Release as if exhaling through a drinking straw.

Reverse the movements of the **Stretch Prayer**, returning to prayer hands. Twist right as you exhale and extend your left hand to high-five a neighbor. Return to center on an inhale then twist left as you exhale and extend your right hand to high-five a neighbor.

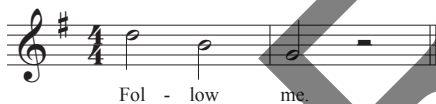
Prompt singers to sit and follow the directions in **The Posture Song**.

Establish a slow 6/8 meter, alternating left and right heels on beats 1 and 4. Add hand movements to emphasize these beats. Maintaining this movement, invite singers to join in **Psalm 105** with animated speech.

Echo sounds as a siren or vocal slide:



Follow Me: Modulate up/down as desired



Echo sing **I Will Never Leave You** (see *Appendix 1*) at a moderate tempo, in one breath. Shape each vowel carefully.



Objectives

1. Demonstrate correct singing posture
2. Identify scripture as a source of song text
3. Demonstrate basic vowel sounds and shapes
4. Demonstrate clear articulation of consonants

Lesson 2

May God Bless Us and Keep Us

1. Invite a volunteer to remind the group what a benediction is. Ask singers to take out the music for our choir blessing.
2. With piano introduction and accompaniment, sing straight through. Clarify pitches and rhythms.
3. ✨ Ask a child to read the first full thought of the song (m5-9). Ask another child to read the second full thought (m9-13). Continue through the third (m13-17) and fourth full thoughts (m17-21).



If you have non-readers, read each phrase for them in one breath, pausing between phrases. Ask the children to stand as you begin reading and sit when you finish. This action will reinforce the length of the phrase.

4. Encourage children to take in enough breath to sing each of these complete thoughts in one breath. Try it. Ask for a thumbs up/thumbs down poll on how they did personally.
5. Repeat and try again. Better? Not better? Ask for a thumbs up/thumbs down response. Encourage them to continue working. Tell them experienced singers always sing complete thoughts. As they repeat for accurate phrasing, remind singers to open their mouths tall and to round their lips as they sing.

I Use My Lips (see *Appendix 1*)

1. Establish a step-touch, side-to-side movement.
2. Add a snap on the "touch" beats.
3. Echo each articulator's sound:
 - lip trill/horse lips
 - high-hat cymbal imitation
 - tongue trill or rapid movement up and down
4. Encourage the singers to join in these sounds as you sing the text.
5. Invite them to sing with you, repeating once or twice until the text is clear and the articulators (lips, teeth, tongue) are actively engaged.



Focus on Singing

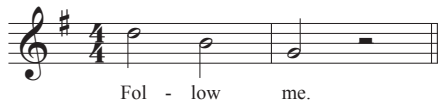
Invite children to mirror your movements as you lead the **Stretch Prayer**.

Inhale as if filling an inner tube around the waist. Release as if exhaling through a drinking straw.

Reverse the movements of the **Stretch Prayer**, returning to prayer hands. Twist right as you exhale and extend your left hand to high-five a neighbor. Return to center on an inhale then twist left as you exhale and extend your right hand to high-five a neighbor.

Prompt singers to sit and follow the directions in the **Posture Song**.

Follow Me



Sing **All the Earth Sings Joy** together. Watch for animated faces.

Sing **Seven Slimy Slugs** together. Sing dramatically and slowly, and maintain clean consonants (don't allow elongated **S** sounds). Then sing quickly and work for clear articulation.

Sing together **I Use My Lips**, reminding singers to use clear articulation to communicate the texts of their songs as if they were the Bible readers for the day.



Objectives

1. Demonstrate correct singer posture
2. Identify scripture as source of song text
3. Demonstrate basic vowel sounds and shapes
4. Demonstrate clear articulation of consonants
5. Demonstrate legato singing

Lesson 24

💡 Review all the songs from the year. Stop as needed to refresh or remind but keep things moving. This is a celebration of all the children have accomplished!

The Lord Is Risen! (He Is Risen Indeed!)

The Heavens Declare the Glory of God

The Lord Is My Light

Behold, I Have Loved You

Hear the assigned readers speak the **Call to Worship** for the Sharing Service

Oh, Sing to the Lord

Light of Light

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

This Is the Day

God Is Present in Our Praising

Close by speaking together the **Singer's Benediction** and singing **May God Bless Us and Keep Us**.



If time is limited, prioritize songs the children have not sung in more than four weeks.

Appendix 1

All the Earth Sings Joy

All the earth sings joy, joy, joy!

BINGO

There was a farm - er had a dog, and BIN-GO was his name - o.

B - I - N-G-O, B - I - N-G-O, B - I - N-G-O, and BIN-GO was his name - o.

God Is Present in Our Praising

God is pre-sent in our prais-ing, all our songs and voic-es rais-ing to the mak-er of our days.

I Use My Lips

Swing! (♩ = 120)

(horse lips) (hi hat)

I use my lips to praise you Lord. I use my teeth to

(tongue roll)

praise you Lord. I use my tongue to praise you Lord, each day. —

(snaps) (claps)

For when I sing your words so clear, I sing them strong for

all to hear. I use my lips, teeth, and tongue to praise — the Lord — in song. —

Expectations and Natural Boundaries for the Child's Voice

Expectations you should hold for your young singers:

- Pure intonation
- Clear, free tone quality
- Supported singing
- The ability to adapt tone color to match variety in repertoire
- Clear diction and clean articulation
- Round vowels and tall mouth space
- Correct singing posture
- Animated faces and voices

There are natural boundaries to vocal ability that will be overcome with age, experience, and training. These boundaries are not always tied to chronological age - as children who start young will be more proficient than those of the same age who enter choir later in life. Those who participate in community and school choirs, singing more than once a week, will quickly achieve growth in each area.

Vocal range expands with age and training. Start young singers on the treble staff (F4-C5). Gently stretch in both directions through targeted exercises and strengthening breath control. Vocal agility also improves with training and experience. As children grow into and discover their voices, they should not be encouraged to sing loudly. Instead, they should be encouraged to sing strongly or with fullness. Remind them to never sing louder than they can sing well. Keep in mind as you plan rehearsals that an immature voice tires quicker than a more experienced and trained voice.

Memorizing Scripture through Song

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly
as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom,
and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs
with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

Colossians 3:16

Helen Kemp recounted a story of a young woman who, twenty-five years after learning to sing in Helen's Cherub Choir, had recalled a specific song with fondness. This experience caused Helen to ponder the worth of the repertoire she chose for her singers: "Have the thoughts, the poetry, the tunes, the songs been worthy of years of storage in their memory banks? Have I helped them to inherit the truth and beauty of our faith?"¹

Memorizing scripture is an important aspect of faith development. In our world of instant digital recall, we don't commit much to memory. Even phone numbers are not in our long-term storage because our phones hold them at the ready. Regardless of the ease of locating Bible passages through search engines, scripture doesn't change us until it comes to life inside us. The Bible does not say, "I have written a verse on a sticky note that I might not sin against you." It doesn't say, "I have bookmarked a Bible database that I might not sin against you." Psalm 119:11 says, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." How can we help our children hide God's word in their hearts? We teach songs that set these words to music. Rehearsal inherently contains repetition. Repeated exposure coupled with melody and rhythm intrench the texts in our brains. The result of years of well-chosen repertoire taught attentively is a stockpile of scriptures stored deeply in the memory.

During the repertoire review process, consider the range of texts you select and lean heavily on scripture and metrical or poetic settings of Biblical texts. Time spent learning these songs will always be beneficial—even if they don't make it into a service. Isaiah 55:10-11 says, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth; it will not return to me empty."

Specify for your singers when texts are scripture verses. Encourage them to look up the verses in their Bibles and attach references to the passages. This step highlights for children how to use their Bibles to seek guidance, instruction, and encouragement from God rather than assuming they must rely on the words of people—as beneficial as they may be—to find solutions. Hymns and poems are very helpful in establishing a common experience with other Christians, but God's word is our best guide. We can assist in faith development by pointing children to the source.

The resource materials for this curriculum include scripture reference posters for your rehearsal room wall, vocal exercises and speaking chants with Biblical texts, and repertoire that sets to music various scripture verses.

¹ Helen Kemp, "Children Inherit the Faith through Music," *Pastoral Musician* 15, no. 1, (1990): 39.