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# 150 Ways to Talk to God: Introducing Kids and Teens to the Psalms

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## **Symposium 2013 Session C-18**

### **150 Ways to Talk to God: Introducing Kids and Teens to the Psalms**

**Laura Keeley and Robert J. Keeley**

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#### **Why Psalms with Children and Teens?**

- Psalms tell us how to talk to God
- Psalms are the songs of God's people.
- The people of Israel knew the Psalms well including children and teens.
- Psalms remind us that God takes us as we are.
- The Psalms give us the language that we can use to help get at some complex faith issues. (Depression, death, illness, anxiety, loneliness.)
- Psalms speak to our emotions.
- Postmoderns approach scripture in a new way.
- Worship is habit-forming. The Psalms shape us.
- Psalms are both formative and reflective.
- The Psalms can have real impact on the faith formation of kids and teens by helping them see that faith is not just something that happens at church but that it connects with them in very real ways.

#### **How do we make the Psalms concrete, child friendly, bite sized, and approachable but still retain the Psalm's intent, meaning and beauty?**

##### **Psalm 107 – for all ages**

- Very Young (3-5)
  - Memorize the first verse. Talk about the word “endures.”
  - Repeat after me: Give thanks to the Lord/ For he is good / his love endures/ forever.
  - Repetition over time -- Do it every week for a while.
  - Activity related to thanks and love – make a list of what they're thankful for
  - Each child picks one thing to touch that they are thankful for saying, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.”
- Young children (6-9)
  - Take a part of it, vs. 1-9 (the psalm repeats so this gets at much of it)
  - Talk about why the people in these verses were sad and miserable.
  - What did God do for them?
  - Talk about what makes you sad.
  - What does God do for you? Write or draw these things.
  - Learn the first verse using repetition.
  - If you were going to write this in a fancy way, which word or words would you make the biggest?

- Middle children (10-14)
  - Use the whole psalm and give them highlighters to find the pattern in the psalm.
    - Blue – trouble
    - Green – God’s response
    - Yellow – our thanks
  - Then write a pattern like this for people their age.
  - Pick one verse that summarizes the psalm.
- High school and older
  - Look for the pattern in the psalm. Highlighters can help at this age too.
  - Write their own pattern (like verses 1-9).
  - Create a readers theater to illustrate the inherent pattern in the psalm.
  - Do a paraphrase of the psalm. Articulate that God’s people are not always happy but God hears them and comes to their aid. We can bring our problems to God.
  - Read it in *Psalms/Now* or *The Message* to compare with another writer.

## Access Points

1. Connect Psalms with Stories
  - a. Psalm 51 David and Bathsheba
  - b. Psalm 22 Jesus on the cross
  - c. Psalm 1 The giving of the law
  - d. Psalm 3 David fleeing from Absalom
  - e. Psalm 13 Joseph in the pit
  - f. Psalm 91 Elisha and Blind Arameans
  - g. Psalm 116 Jesus at the Last Supper
  - h. Psalm 145:4-7 Joshua crossing the Red Sea
  - i. Psalm 145:8- Jonah waiting for Nineveh to be destroyed
2. Make The Psalms Part of Everyday Life
  - a. Memorize, repetition
  - b. Call and response
  - c. Use Psalm 24 to take attendance
3. Songs -- *Psalms for all Seasons*
  - a. “Step by Step” Psalm 63
  - b. “Shout to the Lord” Psalm 98
  - c. “Don’t Be Afraid” by John Bell used with a reading from Psalm 46
4. Dramatic Reading -- NRSV and Message -- Psalm 13
5. Family Devotionals by Laura and Bob Keeley (attached)
6. Art *The Book of Psalms* by Timothy R. Botts  
*Praying in Color* by Sybil McBeth

7. Write Your Own Psalm

Write Psalm 151

**Psalm 100.**

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.

[Write something nice about God!]

Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

[Write something about how glad we are to serve or belong to God and how we do that.]

Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

[What do you know about God and your relationship to Him?]

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

[What should we do for God?]

For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

[What is true about God?]

[http://www.biblewise.com/character/thanksgiving/thanksgiving\\_projects.htm](http://www.biblewise.com/character/thanksgiving/thanksgiving_projects.htm)

8. Psalms in Other Literature

- a. *Psalms for Young Children* by Marie Helene Deval
- b. *What Does the Sky Say?* By Nancy White Carlstrom il by Tim Ladwig
- c. *Sing Praise* by Rhonda Growler Greene il by Janet Broxon
- d. *Illustrated Psalms of Praise/Salmos De Alabanza Ilustrados* il by Amy Ribordy Reese
- e. *Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd – Psalm 139.
- f. Children’s Books on the Psalms  
<http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/bibliography-children-s-books-about-worship>

9. Vertical Habits (See [worship.calvin.edu](http://worship.calvin.edu), enter Vertical Habits in the search box)

	<b>Relational Words</b>	<b>Model Psalm</b>	<b>Worship Words</b>
1	<i>Love You.</i>	<i>Psalm 95</i>	<b>Praise</b>
2	<i>Sorry.</i>	<i>Psalm 51</i>	<b>Confession</b>
3	<i>Why?</i>	<i>Psalm 13</i>	<b>Lament</b>
4	<i>I'm Listening.</i>	<i>Psalm 119</i>	<b>Illumination</b>
5	<i>Help.</i>	<i>Psalm 86</i>	<b>Petition</b>
6	<i>Thank You.</i>	<i>Psalm 136</i>	<b>Thanksgiving</b>
7	<i>What Can I Do?</i>	<i>Psalm 116</i>	<b>Service</b>
8	<i>Bless You.</i>	<i>Psalm 103</i>	<b>Blessing</b>

### **Draft of Psalm For Families, a Devotional:**

*Psalms for Families* is a devotional book designed for the entire family to explore the riches of the Psalms. Each Psalm has four devotionals that can be read at four different times so the family becomes better acquainted with and immersed in the Psalm. Through devotionals that can be read at mealtime, before bed or any other time, a family will learn more about the praise, prayers and laments that are in the Psalms. Notes for adults give additional information and background for each Psalm.

## **Psalm 136**

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

*His love endures forever.*

<sup>2</sup> Give thanks to the God of gods.

*His love endures forever.*

<sup>3</sup> Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

*His love endures forever....*

### **Prayer**

Loving Father,

you have been with your people since the beginning. Your loving care has protected us, fed us, and sheltered us. We give you thanks for creation, for the wonderful things you did in the past and for being with us today. Your love is forever. Amen.

### **Devotional 1: His Love Endures Forever – Psalm 136**

When Psalm 136 was written, they didn't have printing presses, copy machines or projectors. Psalm 136 appears to have been specifically written to be read out loud with everyone responding. Without reading materials, the response had to be one that people could quickly learn. And this one certainly is! The refrain of "His love endures forever" occurs twenty six times in this Psalm.

Choose one person to read the first line in each verse and ask everyone else to respond with the phrase "His love endures forever." Read Psalm 136:1-9.

By joining together as a group and responding together, we are reminded that we are one people – the people of God.

Psalm 136 is also one of the Psalms (called Hallel Psalms) that are often used during the Passover.
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Imagine people who live far away from you saying, "His love endures forever" the same way you are. Maybe they're doing it in a different language or with a different accent from you but they are brothers and sisters in Christ. When you say this together you are also reminded that the people of God are not just now – people have been saying this for thousands of years! The people of Israel, even the ones who lived before Jesus was born,

said this together. Christians who lived in Europe during the Middle Ages, Christians who have lived through wars and times of great sickness, Christians who were explorers, scientists, people in many, many times and places have said these words together. When we speak these words we are joining with people all over the world who, for generations, have stood together and heard Psalm 136 and proclaimed “His Love Endures Forever”. We combine our voices with the people who love God today and those who lived before us.

We are not alone when we read the Psalms. These words help us focus on God’s enduring love, a love that endured through all those generations and continues today. Thanks be to God!

**Enter the Psalm:** Go around the group and ask each person to mention some people who might be saying “His love endures forever” today. Think about missionaries who you know or places where you have visited or where people from your church have gone. Remember these brothers and sisters in Christ in your prayer as you pray for the church that is much bigger than just here and now.

## **Devotional 2: Thank You – Psalm 136**

In Psalm 136 we repeat the phrase “his love endures forever” twenty six times but this Psalm is only partly about God’s love – it is also a Psalm of thanksgiving. **Read Psalm 136: 1- 9.** Choose one person to be the reader. Everyone else says “His love endures forever” after each phrase is read. As you read or listen to the reading think about what we should be thankful for.

Did you notice all the thanksgiving that goes on in these verses? Are you thankful? You probably are – at least you’ve probably been taught to say “thank you” when someone does something for you. When we say thank you we don’t just express thanks to the person who did something for us we are also reminded that what we have often comes from the hands of others. Actually, what we have always comes from the hand of God. Even when someone does something for us, God gifted that person with the ability to do that thing for you. God gave that person the resources to allow him or her to give you the thing you got. God gave that person strength for the day so that he or she could do something for you. God even gives you the strength to say “thank you.”

So as we say thank you over the next few days, remember also that God deserves our thanks at the same time. So how do we thank God?

- By loving him with our heart.
- By spending time with him.
- By telling others about him.
- By doing the things he wants us to do.
- By praying.

So what should you give thanks to God for today?

**Enter the Psalm:** Write the words “Thank you, God” on the center of piece of paper. Leave the paper out for one day. As you go through the day, stop and draw or write what you are thankful for. Talk about what you wrote together.

### **Devotional 3: Remember – Psalm 136**

“Remember when we went to the fireworks together? That was awesome.” Did you ever say something like that? Maybe it wasn’t fireworks. Maybe it was a day at the beach or a special family vacation or even just a time when the whole family was together. We talk about these times together and we each add our memories to the conversation. We enjoy doing that. It is fun to remember good times together and talking about them helps us all refresh our memories.

Psalm 136 is like one of those conversations for the Israelite people. Read Psalm 136: 4-15.

See the list of things the Psalm writer is remembering? In this Psalm the writer says, “remember when God made the heavens? That was awesome. Remember when God spread out the water and the land? That was awesome too.” Then we read about the other big event in Israelite history – being rescued from slavery in Egypt. The writer recalls Israel’s call for help, God’s rescue and bringing them to the promised land as a way to remind everyone of some of the big things that God has done for the people of Israel.

This is also a big event for us as modern day Christians. We, too, were in slavery. Not literal slavery like the Israelites were, but we are helpless to do anything about our sinful nature. So, like the Israelites, we cry to God for help. And God comes to our rescue just like he did for the Israelites. God sent his Son, Jesus, to die on a cross for us. How do we know God is going to continue to rescue us? He’s done it before – remember the time when he created the world? Remember the time when he rescued his people from Egypt? We too have a promised land that God will bring us to. God’s love lasts forever.

**Enter the Psalm:** What are some of the things you like to remember? Have you done any things with your family or friends that you like to talk about? Are there any times when you really noticed God’s faithfulness in your life? Spend a few moments talking about these things and then read again the first three verses of Psalm 136.

## Devotional 4: The God Who Keeps His Promises --Psalm 136

The writer of Psalm 136 spends a lot of his time reminding the readers of the things God has done for them. In the last section of the Psalm we read a couple of names that are not so familiar to modern readers: Sihon and Og.

Sihon and Og show up briefly in Numbers 21 in a story that takes place while the Israelites are wandering in the desert after they had been freed from the Egyptians and before they settled in the Promised Land. It was called the Promised Land because God promised it to Abraham way back in Genesis. The Amorites were between the Promised Land and the Israelites. Israel wanted to pass through the area of the Amorites so they sent a nice little message to their king, Sihon, saying, "Please let us pass through. We promise we won't touch anything." But Sihon, the king, would not let Israel pass. Instead, he gathered his entire army and met them in battle. God gave Israel a great victory over the Amorites and Sihon that day. After this, another king, the king of Bashan, whose name was Og, also came out and met Israel in battle. Once again, the Lord gave Israel the victory.

Read Psalm 136: 1 and then 16-26.

These two kings, Sihon and Og, are the two who are mentioned in Psalm 136. The Psalmist points to these two battles, specifically, as ones that he wants the people to remember. These serve as great examples of powerful men who thought they could stop the God of the Israelites. These kings thought they could stand in the way of God fulfilling his promise to his people. They were wrong, of course, and it was important for the people of Israel to remember that. This God, whose love endures forever, not only created everything, he not only rescued them from slavery in Egypt but he triumphed over powerful kings! He made sure his people were given the land that he promised them.

The people of Israel are not the only people who need to remember this – we do too. We can find ourselves doubting that God can actually defeat human powers and that he can actually do the things he says he can do. God keeps his promises. He did it when he defeated Pharaoh, he did it when he defeated Sihon and Og and he does it today. Our God loves us – his love endures forever. He will take care of us, just as he took care of his people all those years ago. That's a promise we can depend on.

**Enter the Psalm:** Our God keeps his promises. He kept his promise to Noah, Abraham and David. What things has God promised you?



## Responding To Our God – Psalm 136 Notes for Adults

One way of looking at worship is that it is the retelling of God's covenant story. We come together to hear and experience the story of God's work in our lives and in the lives of His people throughout history. Our worship services are often a retelling of these stories and a renewal of the covenant of grace

In some ways, Psalm 136 is like a little worship service. The story of God's salvation to the people of Israel is retold. And, just like in a worship service, there is a place for the people to respond with the refrain, "his love endures forever." This Psalm was perhaps written for use in public gatherings to recount the history of God's faithfulness.

The Psalm begins with a call for thankfulness and praise to God in the first three verses and then begins the recitation of God's work in the lives of his people. It reminds us what God did in creation (verses 4-9), moves on to how God saved the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (verses 10-16) and lead Israel to conquer Canaan (verses 17-25.) The ending matches the beginning when verse 26 states, "Give thanks to the God of Heaven."

The phrase "the God of Heaven" that we see in Psalm 136:26 is a phrase that is used often in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel, suggesting that this Psalm may have been written during that same time, the time of the Babylonian exile.

This Psalm invites us to draw close to God and to thank him for who he is and what he has done in our lives. He is not just the God who has done these things for people many years ago. He is the God who also does them for us. His love endures forever.