

# KIDS WORSHIP

Awakening  
the Church of  
~~Tomorrow~~

TODAY

David  
Ray

FOREWORD BY  
ROBBIE SEAY

# Praise for Kids Worship

These are important questions that we must pause to answer. God is inviting us into a reset so we can help every generation express the heart of worship they were made for. This isn't optional reading, it is necessary. Take heed. This is an insightful and practical book for the Church, period. But especially if you minister to children, I plead with you to take these words to heart.

## **Yancy**

Multiple Dove Award-winning artist, songwriter, worship leader, and author of *Sweet Sound: The Power of Discipling Kids in Worship*

Dave has written a powerful and timely book that every children's ministry leader needs to read. *Kids Worship: Awakening the Church of Today* reminds us that kids aren't just the church of tomorrow—they are worshipers today, fully capable of encountering God in deep and meaningful ways. This book is both inspiring and practical, offering a clear roadmap for creating worship experiences that truly engage the hearts of children.

## **Ryan Frank**

CEO/Publisher of KidzMatter

Dave Ray is a gift! He is a gifted communicator who cares so much about teaching children to worship. This book, grounded in Scripture and years of experience, will be a tremendous resource to all who care about worship and children.

## **Jeff Wells**

Senior Pastor of WoodsEdge Community Church and author of *Unhurried Time with God* and *Pray as They Prayed*

Reading this felt like sitting down with a friend who gets the highs, lows, and chaos of kids' ministry and believes God wants to do something powerful through it. This book is full of truth, encouragement, and timely reminders that kids were created to worship now. Dave doesn't just give us inspiration; he offers a realignment of our calling. If you care about kids, worship, or the church's future, this one's for you!

### **John Bolin**

Vice President of Semsen Music, professor at California Baptist University, worship pastor, composer, arranger, and author of *How to Spell WORSHIP with Your Family*

After reading this book, I promise you will never be able to approach ministry to kids in the same way. Dave simply and systematically introduces us to the next level of ministry we are called to lead for the church of today. I pray God urgently uses this book to awaken your ministry possibilities, reset your biblical definition of worship, and recalibrate your church's practice of discipleship.

### **Mark Campbell**

Executive Vice President of U.S. Ministries, Awana

Dave Ray gets it. His heart for kids, his passion for worship, and his deep understanding of the church's call to raise up a generation of worshipers shine through in everything he does. When I first met Dave, I remember thinking, this guy just carries something different. There's a peace about him, a joy, a sense of anointing that makes it clear: Dave doesn't just lead worship—he lives it. If you're longing to see the kids in your church worship with depth and authenticity, *Kids Worship: Awakening the Church of Today* is a must-read.

### **Sean Sweet**

Community Director, FourFiveSix.org

Dave's catalytic passion and calling to encourage and equip kids and families to worship God are evidenced in every word he has carefully crafted in this book and every song he has ever written.

**Craig Adams**

Producer



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*For my three next-generation worshipers*



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“Do you hear what these children are saying?”  
they asked him.

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,  
“From the lips of children and infants  
you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”

**Matthew 21:16**



# Foreword

I first met Dave and Jess Ray in the early 2000s and I remember thinking, *Why are these gifted musicians spending so much time, energy and money on worship music for kids?*

At the time, we were all young songwriters and recording artists in Texas, and sadly I was mostly focused on my own music and career and less concerned with the hearts and minds of children. It was an exciting time for worship leaders and songwriters, as worship music was having a major season of growth. Movements like Passion and Hillsong were just coming to life, and for the first time ever, songs written for Sunday morning were becoming mainstream on radio and eventually streaming.

The mainstream commercialization of worship music proved to be consequential for better and for worse—which I won't explore here. But nonetheless, at that time, I couldn't imagine how writing songs for children to sing could be more important than the opportunity to be a part of this new movement of worship songs written primarily for college students and young adults.

However, it was in that season that Liz, my wife of nearly three decades now, and I were starting a family. We quickly found ourselves with four small children in tow, and I can remember the first time we



listened to Doorpost Kids Worship. I couldn't believe how good these "kids' songs" were! This was not the typical music for elementary-age children I was used to hearing (and wished I had never heard). No, this felt different—these songs were worshipful and beautiful.

I was also struck at how much Scripture was in the lyrics of these songs. More than general or vague concepts about God, these songs were straight from God's Word and were helpful in remembering Scripture with our kids. Dave and Jess were doing exactly what God had called them to do. Years later, as I sat down to read this very book, it was crystal clear to me that the Lord was directing each and every step (Proverbs 16:9). My prayer is that the Lord will use this book to direct my steps and yours as we consider joining Dave and Jess in this great calling.

Today I lead The Worship Initiative, and I interact with worship leaders and churches all day, every day. I love my work! We serve more than 100,000 worshipers from almost 11,000 churches in dozens of denominations all over the world. My front-row seat to what is happening in Christendom in the area of worship has led me to conclude several things about this crucial moment in which we find ourselves.

I have a strong sense that there are far fewer children's choirs and less worship training for kids than when I was of school age. I have a sense that for most churches, the bar to participate in worship ministry is higher and more difficult to reach than ever before. I've seen data that in our schools, music and choir programs are rapidly declining with less budget and less emphasis on the arts than at any point in the last five decades.

I have extensively reviewed the research from Dr. Will Bishop at William Carey University on congregational singing and engagement. This research tells us that the church is singing less today than at any point in the last several decades, and that God's Word is no longer the primary lyrical content of Sunday morning worship songs and hymns. In summary, we have:

- Fewer kids' choirs and musical programs
- Fewer opportunities for kids and students in worship ministry
- Less singing in congregations
- Less of the Scriptures in our song lyrics

I am convinced that all these observations about the state of worship in the church—and specifically about the involvement and discipleship of kids and students—are related. I am more convinced than ever that the mission Dave and Jess have been on all these years is for all of us *today*—to disciple, train, and lead children to a right understanding of God in worship. This is perhaps the most valuable way to spend our time on this earth. *Really!* Can you think of anything that potentially has a greater reward in heaven than Christ-centered, Gospel-telling worship for children? Children coming to know Jesus, love Jesus and surrender their lives in worship to the only One who is worthy of our praise—I want to be a part of that, don't you?!

Woven throughout this book is a genuine calling to commit time, talent and treasure to serve children in the area of worship. With great songs that are true and fun to sing? Absolutely. But what Dave has done in this book goes far beyond songs. He leads us to think deeply and rightly about lives lived in worship. He helps us with practical counsel on how to teach a theology of worship to our kids and students. More than tired formulas and methodology in kids' worship, the invitation in these pages is to ask the Spirit of God to move powerfully in the hearts and heads of children, and to recognize this as the greatest calling in the church.

I believe this is our greatest calling because Jesus said so. In Matthew 19, Jesus rebukes his disciples when they somehow think that children are less important than the adults (see my old way of thinking from above) and he says to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matt. 19:14) And in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches that we should long for the kingdom of heaven on earth (Matt. 6:10). I want God to show me glimpses of the heavenly realm right here in my daily life on earth. Jesus

reminds his disciples—and Dave reminds us in this book—that there is no greater glimpse of God’s kingdom than in the lives of children learning to love and worship Jesus.

Psalm 145:4 says it best: “One generation shall commend your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts.” I’m so grateful you picked up a copy of this book and are heeding the call of Jesus to minister to the next generation. Let’s do this work together! *Kids Worship: Awakening the Church of Today* is a great place to begin!

**Robbie Seay**

The Worship Initiative

## CHAPTER 1

# Awakening

A charismatic young preacher stands on a stage before a captivated crowd of thousands. He is slender, handsome, and well-dressed. The welcome coolness of an autumn evening settles over the audience, packed shoulder to shoulder in the large, open area. Aside from the speaker's voice, it is almost eerily silent.

The people lean in eagerly. They don't want to miss the words that pour from his mouth with passion and fire. This is no tired academic exercise or dusty homily. He seems to hold the people's emotions in the palm of his hand. They ebb and flow as his voice rises and falls. He crescendos to a thunderous climax. People are weeping and trembling. They cry out for mercy from God. Multitudes are converted.

The speaker is not a modern-day televangelist, nor is this a scene from a Billy Graham crusade. The setting is Boston Common, a wide, green space in the center of colonial Boston, Massachusetts where, on October 12, 1740, as many as 20,000 people—more than the entire population of the city—gathered to hear George Whitefield preach.<sup>1</sup> In a modern mega-church, the noticeably cross-eyed Whitefield would be relegated to a “non-platform” role. But in Colonial America, as in his home country of England, Whitefield drew enormous crowds with his message

of repentance and renewal. Lauding Whitefield's sermons, Benjamin Franklin wrote, "Every accent, every modulation of voice was so perfectly well turned and well placed. A pleasure of much the same kind that is received from an excellent piece of music."<sup>2</sup>

Whitefield preaches the gospel as if it were real and alive—so different from the stodgy rectors in their lofty pulpits to which the people are accustomed. "I am verily persuaded," he wrote in his journal, "the Generality of Preachers talk of an unknown, unfelt Christ. And the Reason why Congregations have been so dead, is because dead Men preach to them."<sup>3</sup> But these people are dead no longer. Something is awakening.

Five days later, Whitefield met a local preacher named Jonathan Edwards. "A solid, excellent Christian," Whitefield recorded of Edwards. "I think I have not seen his fellow in all New England."<sup>4</sup> The soft-spoken Edwards and the fiery Whitefield became leading figures in a revival that swept the American colonies, a movement later known as the Great Awakening. During this period of spiritual renewal, untold thousands came to faith. Traditional denominations were challenged. And something remarkable happened. Amid the religious fervor, *adults* were not the only ones responding to the gospel.

In a letter to his friend, Dr. Benjamin Colman, Edwards reported a surprising phenomenon among children:

"It has heretofore been looked on as a strange thing, when any have [been saved] and remarkably changed in their childhood. [Yet at one revival meeting,] Near thirty were ... [saved] between 10 and 14 years of age; two between 9 and 10, and one of about four years of age; and because I suppose this last will be with most difficulty believed, I will hereafter give a particular account of it."<sup>5</sup>

In meticulous detail, Edwards then attempted to prove the truthfulness of four-year-old Phebe Bartlet's conversion. She was constant in prayer, filled with joy, had compassion for the poor, and was eager to see others

come to know Christ.<sup>6</sup> Despite the prevailing opinions of the day, Edwards was convinced that her faith was genuine.

From the vantage of our modern church culture, Edwards' incredulity at the response of children to the gospel is striking. Today we have widely accepted the fact that childhood is the most crucial time in a person's spiritual development.<sup>7</sup> We know the grim statistics about how few choose to follow Christ in adulthood. How many of us "walked the aisle" on Thursday morning at VBS or on the last night of youth camp? How many of our baptism rolls are full of 10-year-olds (while also being devoid of 40-year-olds)? Thank goodness we know better now. Don't we?

About 50 years after the first Great Awakening, a second period of revival swept the country. It became known (creatively) as the Second Great Awakening (c. 1790-1840). If the First opened our eyes to the genuineness of childhood faith, the Second saw the rise of religious education for children. Books and songs designed specifically for kids began to appear, although they were perhaps better in intent than in execution. One particularly joyous hymn for "young people" invited them to imagine their own graves, attended by mourning friends:

*Your friends may pass that lonesome place,  
And with a sigh move slowly on,  
Still gazing on the spires of grass,  
With which your graves are overgrown.*<sup>8</sup>

Just imagine Psalty the Singing Songbook humming that cheerful ditty. But while the hymns may have been a bit morose, the heart was in the right place. Pastors emphasized the role of the family and encouraged parents to play an active role in their children's spiritual development.<sup>9</sup> Isn't it interesting that these two Great Awakenings were accompanied by a corresponding awakening of the church to the next generation?

At one church where I served as a worship leader, we made a big deal of sending the kids out to children's church in the middle of the service. As the band played a short, upbeat section of a song, the kids raced down the aisles and out to their venue. It was the only time running in

church was acceptable. “That’s my favorite part of the service,” one older congregant remarked wistfully to me. “You know, they’re the church of tomorrow.”

*The church of tomorrow.* It’s not an ill-intended phrase. Many of the kids in our churches will one day lead as pastors, deacons, or elders; serve as volunteers; support with their tithes; and wrangle their own kids into our ministry areas. Yet “tomorrow” must never become our paradigm for children in the church. They don’t have to wait for some future date to be loved by their heavenly Father and to love him in return. No minimum age is required to worship deeply, serve wholeheartedly, or give selflessly. The same Holy Spirit woos the hearts of 9-year-olds and 90-year-olds. Kids are not the church of *tomorrow*, they are the church of *today*.

By some measures, the American church has never cared so much for children as they do now. Many churches have dedicated staff members *just* for kids, a fact that would likely surprise the early church fathers. We have custom-designed, theme-park-inspired children’s ministry environments. Resources for children seem to be everywhere: books, curriculum, t-shirts, apps, stickers, nursery furniture, stackable risers, and whatever else has sufficient profit margin. So many VBS options exist that events are specifically designed to help us sort through them. The market is booming.

But by what *biblical* measures are we excelling? Do our kids love Jesus with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mk. 12:30)? Has the Word of God been impressed on their minds (Deut. 6:7) and written on their hearts (Prov. 3:3)? Do shouts of praise spring from their lips (Matt. 21:15-16)? Do we, like the disciples, view children as an annoyance (Matt. 19:13) to be conveniently contained in a separate building? Or, like Jesus, do we view them as a blessing to be welcomed and nurtured (Matt. 19:14-15)? Are we investing in children’s ministry for the sake of their spiritual development? Or because it’s an effective strategy to attract stable, financially prosperous families to support next year’s budget growth?

By now, many of us are familiar with Barna’s research on young adults leaving the church. If yours is a typical church, a startling two-

thirds of the kids in your children's ministry will leave the church in young adulthood.<sup>10</sup> It's tempting to allow this statistic to remain impersonal and distant, a danger for others but not for you. But consider your own family. If you have three kids, will two of them walk away from their faith? God forbid!

What will keep our children tethered to Christ? It will not be the immersive environments, the hyped-up events, or the perfect VBS. It will not be the right furniture, the right curriculum, or the right parent resource app. Our kids must become worshipers. And this task can't wait for tomorrow.

Studies from the Barna Group indicate that "a person's moral foundations are generally in place by the time they reach age nine. ... [and] in most cases, people's spiritual beliefs are irrevocably formed when they are pre-teens."<sup>11</sup> This should wake us up to the urgency of our mission. If God wants to form worshipers, then childhood is not the prelude to the real thing, *it is the main attraction*. The way our kids learn to worship may be the *most* important spiritual formation of their lives. Our children aren't warming up to enter the game. They are *in* the big leagues!

So much could be and will be said about what it means to be a *worshiper*, but a simple statement from Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. And it's a matter of the heart. A worshiper's heart belongs to God. In contrast, the religious leaders of Jesus' day, the Pharisees, knew all about God, talked about God, even followed all the rules, but their hearts were not with him. Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah to describe them:

"These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.  
They worship me in vain;  
their teachings are merely human rules."  
(Matt. 15:8-9)

It's worth noting how closely this passage ties our worship to our heart condition. If our hearts are far from God, our worship is empty. We are merely going through the motions. Not only that, but all our religious knowledge, all our pious obedience, all our "Christianese" church-talk—all



the things we take pharisaical pride in—*all* of it is in vain, mere “human rules.” As Paul put it, if I “do not have love, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2). If our hearts are far from God, nothing else matters.

This should sober us quickly. If our churches produce kids who know about God, behave properly, and *sound* like followers of Christ, we haven’t accomplished anything. Yet how much of our effort is devoted to developing these exact traits? If the heart is what matters, then we need a different focus. We must teach our kids to worship. This is the awakening we need—an awakening of the heart to beat for its Maker. An awakening of worshipers.

So how are you doing in the area of kids’ worship? If you’re like so many of the leaders I’ve spoken with over the years, the answer is, “Not good.” You’re underfunded, under-trained, understaffed, under-supported, and overworked. You’re doing the best you can, but it never seems to be good enough. You’re searching for the right song, the right format, the right volunteers, the right motions, the right venue—anything to make it work. You feel like you’re on your own, and it’s wearing you down. You wonder, *Is the problem the kids? Is it me?*

Friend, I have good news. The problem is not the kids. Each child has a heart that was created to know and love God—now is the time to shape them into worshipers. And the problem is not you either. You don’t have to be a great musician (or a musician at all) to be a great worship leader. You don’t need a seminary degree or a certification. You just need a heart that’s wholly devoted to Jesus. The kids are ready to awaken. Are *you*?

If you are feeling desperate and frustrated, if you are battling despair and discouragement, you are not alone. A few thousand years ago, the anointed-as-king David was pursued by the current King Saul deep into the Judean wilderness. Surrounded by enemies, betrayed by friends, David finds himself cowering in a cave, far from the promised palace.<sup>12</sup> The psalms he writes during this season show his desperation. “Save me, O God,” David cries in Psalm 54. “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you,” he declares in Psalm 56. And in Psalm 57, he finds himself in mortal danger:

"I am in the midst of lions;  
I am forced to dwell among ravenous beasts—  
men whose teeth are spears and arrows,  
whose tongues are sharp swords." (Ps. 57:4)

Remarkably, in the very next verse, something changes in David's heart. David is worshipping: "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth." (v. 5) You can almost hear the energy returning to his bones, the hope returning to his spirit. He is refreshed and renewed as he worships his God, until he finally he erupts in praise:

"My heart, O God, is steadfast,  
my heart is steadfast;  
I will sing and make music.  
Awake, my soul!  
Awake, harp and lyre!  
I will awaken the dawn." (v. 7-8)

"I will awaken the dawn!" What a phrase! David is saying, God, I will give you such praise it will cause the sun to rise! This is the heart of a worshiper.

It's time for such an awakening in our churches. It's time for a generation of worshipers to rise up with a song of praise on their lips that brings the light of day to a world in darkness. It's time for a generation that not only *defies* the statistics but *defines* them. It's time for a new paradigm to shape our approach to kids' worship. It's time for us to stop viewing our kids as the church of tomorrow and start treating them like the church of today.

*Awake, my soul! Awake!*



David Ray, alongside his wife Jess, is the co-founder of Doorpost Kids Worship, a leading provider of kids' worship resources. He is also a pastor at WoodsEdge Community Church, a worship leader, recording artist, and songwriter. His passion is to raise up a new generation of worshipers and worship leaders. In addition to his wife and three kids, some of his favorite things in life are the Houston Astros, a freshly mowed fairway, and homemade icebox cake.

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**Training leaders to awaken a generation of worshipers.**

The **Leading Kids in Worship Masterclass** is the world's first masterclass focused exclusively on helping you lead kids in Spirit-filled, heart-transforming worship. This eight-session video series from Doorpost Kids Worship is led by pastor, worship leader, and author David Ray. Each session addresses the unique challenges and joys of leading worship for kids in a way that is practical, hopeful, and helpful. Grounded in Scripture and supported by decades of experience, the Leading Kids in Worship Masterclass will help you deepen your intimacy with God, plan and execute an effective service, choose great songs, build a committed volunteer team, and improve your worship leadership.

Group rates are available. Find out more at **[doorpostkidsworship.com](https://doorpostkidsworship.com)**.



# It's time to awaken a generation.

Kids are not just the church of tomorrow—they are the church of today. Within them lies incredible potential for authentic, Spirit-filled worship. Yet too often, their role in worship is overlooked or underestimated. It's time for leaders who will rise to the call and awaken not only the hearts of our kids, but the whole body of Christ.

**Kids Worship: Awakening the Church of Today** offers a practical, simple, and deeply helpful guide to nurturing young hearts in worship. With clear teaching, inspiring stories, and tools you can use right away, this book equips leaders, pastors, and parents to invite children into the transforming presence of God.

This is more than a ministry resource. It's an invitation to embrace the opportunity before us—and to see the church awakened through the worship of the next generation.



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