

Praise to the Man: Story Song for both Older and Younger

by Sharla Dance

I'm standing in front of the children. We've already done a movement to another song, and they are settling back into their chairs.

I tell the children that I have a story to tell them.

"Mom, what does 'commune' mean?" Tim asked as he stepped into the kitchen and stole a carrot stick out of the pile his mother was chopping.

Tim's mom looked up. "Well, you know where we live is called a commun-ity. So that's kind of the same word. We know people around us in our community. We laugh with them, we see when they are disappointed, and we hurt for them when something bad happens. We share our thoughts and feelings with each other. That's kind of what commune means... sharing your inner thoughts and feelings with someone."

(Sing the first line of Praise to the Man to the words "prophet and seer.")

Tim stopped in mid crunch of the carrot and raised his eyebrows. "Do you mean that when the song says 'commune with Jehovah' that Joseph Smith was sharing his inner thoughts and feelings with Jesus?"

"I think that is at least part of what it means." Mom answered.

"Wow!" Tim sat quiet for a moment.

"Hey, Mom. What does 'dispensation' mean?"

(Sing the Second line of Praise to the man... to the words "nations revere.")

"Ahhh!" Mom chuckled. "You are really asking me the tough words today! Think of it this way. If Heavenly Father wants to create a system of putting things in order to help his children," Mom's hands were circling around, "he'd probably choose a prophet for that time in history to help him put things in order."

Tim thought about it as he filled up a glass of water.

"Do remember Moses?" she asked. Tim gulped down some water. "Yup." he said.

"Well, he was a leader of a dispensation. Do you remember Abraham?" Tim looked up from wiping his hands on a towel. "Yup." Well, he was a leader of his time ... called a dispensation." Tim's eyebrows went up again. "And Joseph Smith..."

"You mean he was that kind of guy for our time?" Tim asked. "Wow!"

His mother smiled. "Like you say, 'yup.'" Tim smiled because he knew his mother was teasing him. He walked out the back door to go play, but soon stuck his head back in the door.

(Sing the Third Line of Praise to the Man starting with “Hail to the prophet” and ending with “heaven.”)

“So, Mom, what does ‘hail’ mean? They are not talking about the little ice things, are they?” Tim’s mom smiled. “Nope.” she answered. “This kind of ‘hail’ means to salute somebody or greet them because you think they are wonderful.”

Tim turned his head and nodded. “That makes sense! See you Mom!” Tim dashed out the door again.

(Sing the rest of the Third Line starting with “Traitors and...” and ending with “vain.”)

Tim’s mom looked over and saw Tim’s coat sitting on the chair. “Tim!” she called out the door. Tim came running around the corner. “You forgot your coat. And aren’t you going to ask me about another word? There are some more big ones in the song!” Tim smiled and ran up to grab his coat.

(Sing the last line of Praise to the Man starting with “Mingling with gods,..” to the end.)

“I’m going to have to ask about all the other words next time, Mom! My head’s bursting new stuff that you just told me.”

Tim’s mom hugged him. “We can talk about it later then. Just one more thing... do you know that I love the prophet Joseph?” Tim smiled. “Yup!” he shouted as he ran around the corner. Mom grinned.

(At this point, I would probably bear my own short testimony about the prophet Joseph.)

The great thing about this activity is that:

1. It gives the children a chance to listen to different parts of the song while they are intensely engaged in something else ... the story.
2. It defines some of the terms in the song in a way that children can understand, yet in a way that they can take in because it is in story form.
3. It welcomes the Holy Ghost into the room.
4. It allows the brain to assimilate the song little by little.
5. It creates an emotional feeling about the song that adds to the meaning and message of the song.

I have to practice starting in the middle of the song so that I can pick up the new line in the right pitch, but it is worth it. Every time I have tried Story Song with the children, they have listened intensely and relate to the song in a whole new way.