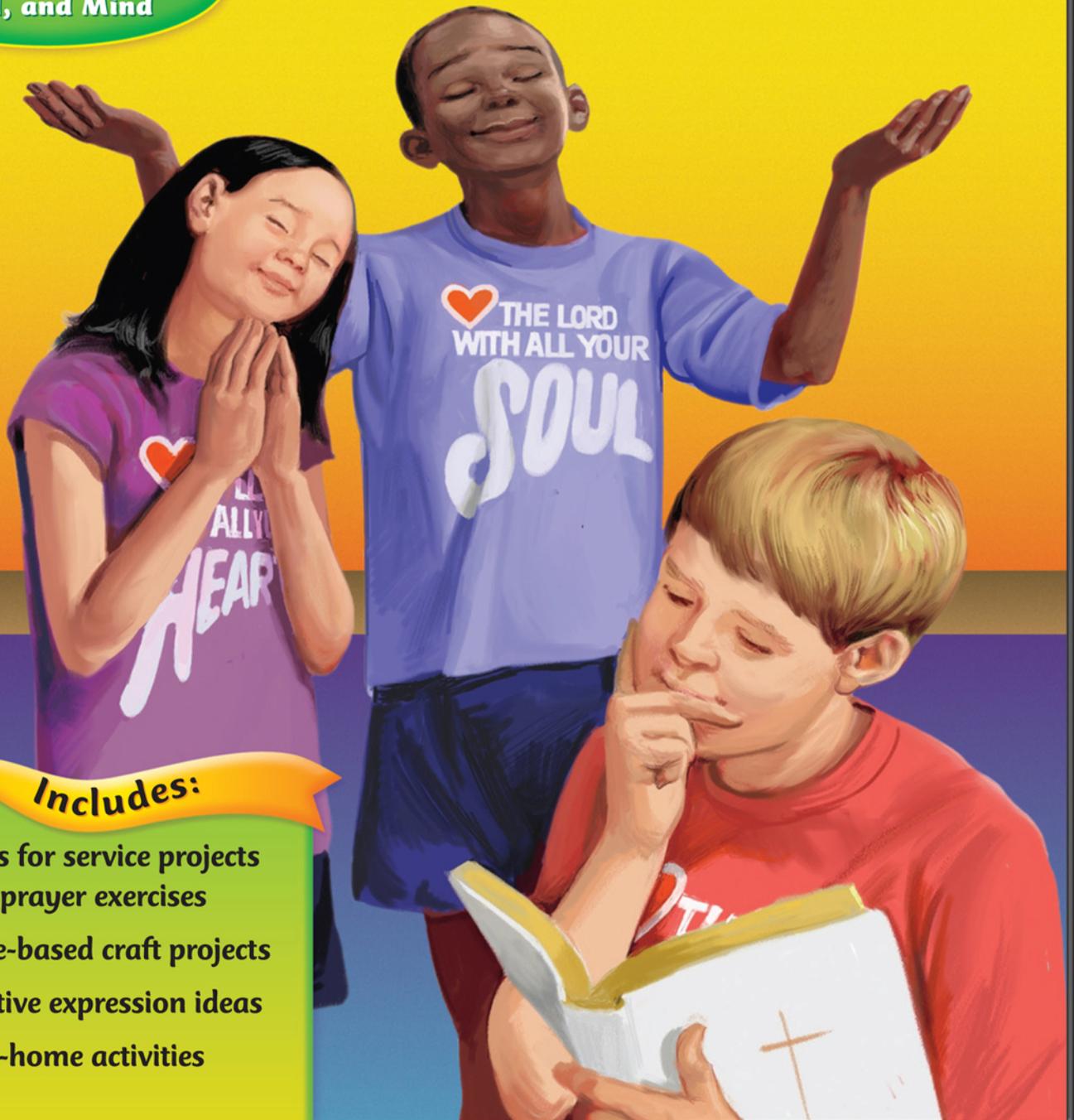




# Spiritual Practices

Biblical Disciplines for Living the Greatest Commandment

Loving God  
with Heart,  
Soul, and Mind



**Includes:**

- ideas for service projects and prayer exercises
- Bible-based craft projects
- creative expression ideas
- take-home activities

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# Introduction

## Making Time for God

Even the youngest children have so many options and opportunities that their schedules can be as busy, if not busier, than those of adults. School, extra-curricular activities, sports, and the demands of family and friends all compete for the attention of our young ones. Spiritual practices can help children make sure that they are making time for God each day.

Consider this metaphor of a radio: God is always speaking to us, just like radio waves are always broadcasting. The problem is that we may not be tuned in to the right frequency or even have our radios turned on at all!

There are a number of spiritual practices that we can use to help tune ourselves to hear the voice of God as He speaks to us. Many of these practices can be traced back to the Old Testament. These practices share a common purpose—to bring a person closer to God and to living according to God’s will.

This book contains nine such practices as they can be adapted for use by children. Whether you are a Sunday school teacher or a parent, introducing children to these practices may be one of the greatest gifts you can give to busy kids.

## Spiritual Practices in the Bible

We often hear people longing for a return to an authentic community united by its love for God and for Jesus Christ, a community that lives what it believes through sharing and service. Such a view suggests that the church of today is merely a reflection of a purer time.

The same comparison could be made between what we call spiritual practices and what we see lived out in the Bible. By calling something a practice or discipline, we formalize what seems to have come naturally to people in the Bible:

- ♦ For David, praising and worshiping God was a way of life.
- ♦ For Jesus, worship at the Temple was an important part of life, but so was talking with God in prayer.
- ♦ Paul sang in response to life and believed in a life characterized by prayer.

## Loving God with Heart, Soul, and Mind

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says that the first and greatest commandment is to love God “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37) This is an extreme command because it asks for all of the faculties within our control. In fact, this commandment calls for us to surrender ourselves to God as an offering of love to the One Who created us. In the words of the apostle Paul, we should present ourselves as “living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” (Romans 12:1)

Those who have been Christians “all of their lives” may say, “easier said than done,” and they are right. Resolutions made in a moment to give everything to God sometimes fall away when we descend from our mountain meeting place with God. God’s Holy Spirit accompanies us on a much more measured journey, as we surrender our lives to God detail by detail.

Spiritual practices are the means of developing ourselves with God’s help in order to present ourselves to God. This book can help you offer children an opportunity to strengthen their resolve and expand their abilities to present their lives to God.

# Loving God with Our Hearts

*The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.  
He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.*

Exodus 15:2

## An Audience of One: Personal Worship

### Introduction to the Practice

It has been said that we were created to worship God. Well, just as pastors are not pastors only one day a week, worshipers are not worshipers only one day a week. Worship as a way of life means living your life out of gratitude and admiration for the God of all creation, the God who created us.

### In the Bible

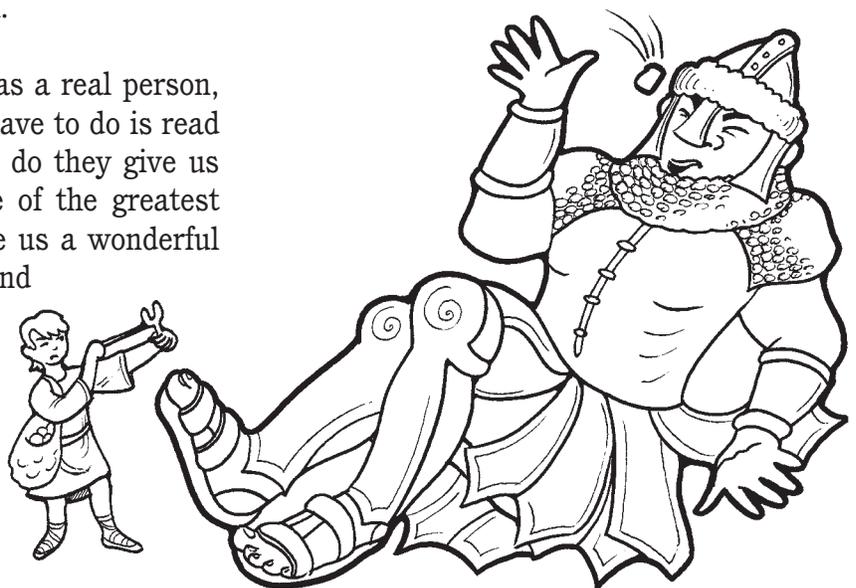
Share these stories and thoughts with children as an introduction to the practice of personal worship:

The Bible tells us many stories about David, including his courageous battle with Goliath, being chosen as king of Israel, being chased by Saul, and the terrible mistake he made by pursuing Bathsheba. These stories paint a picture of David as larger than life, like something out of a comic book.

If we want to get to know David as a real person, a person like you and me, all we have to do is read the psalms David wrote. Not only do they give us a “behind-the-scenes” look at one of the greatest people in the Bible, they also give us a wonderful model of personal worship—the kind of worship we should practice when we are alone with God.

See Psalm 8 in which David’s praise of God’s majesty takes on a personal tone as he asks “what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:4) God, the Creator of the universe, is capable of watching over each one of us—a truly praiseworthy attribute. How appropriate, then, that David is thankful not just for the heavens, the moon, and the stars, but for God’s attention.

Ask children what inspires them to praise God. Is it the wonders of the universe? The sheer size of the world we live in and the people who seem to fill every corner of it? Or is it that the Creator of all this takes interest in and loves them? There is a time to stand in the crowd and applaud and there is a time to stand face-to-face and say “thank you.”

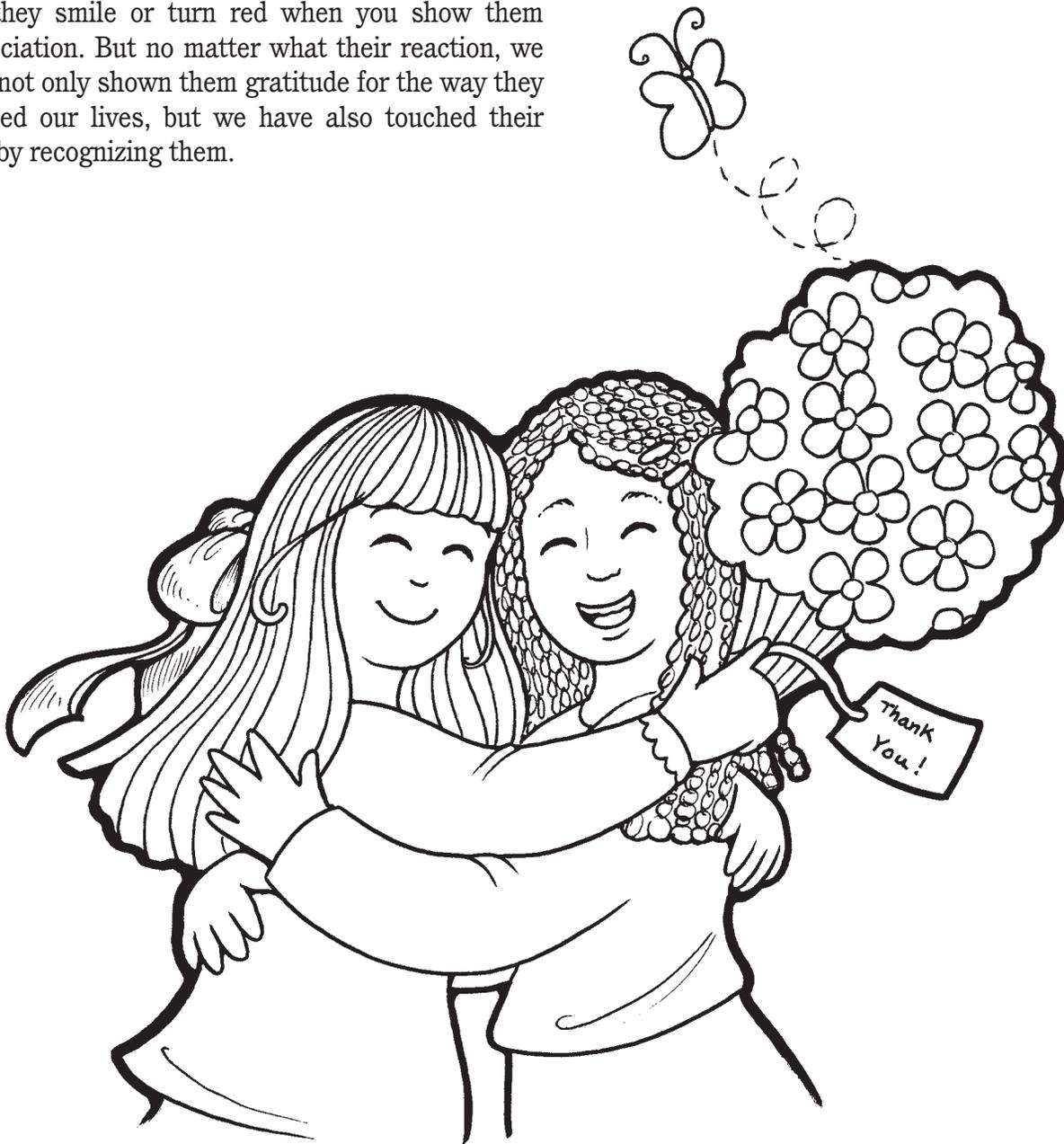


## A Moment Alone

When we see a wonderful performance, we shout praise to the performers. The performers bow and off the stage they go. But do we show this kind of appreciation to our loved ones?

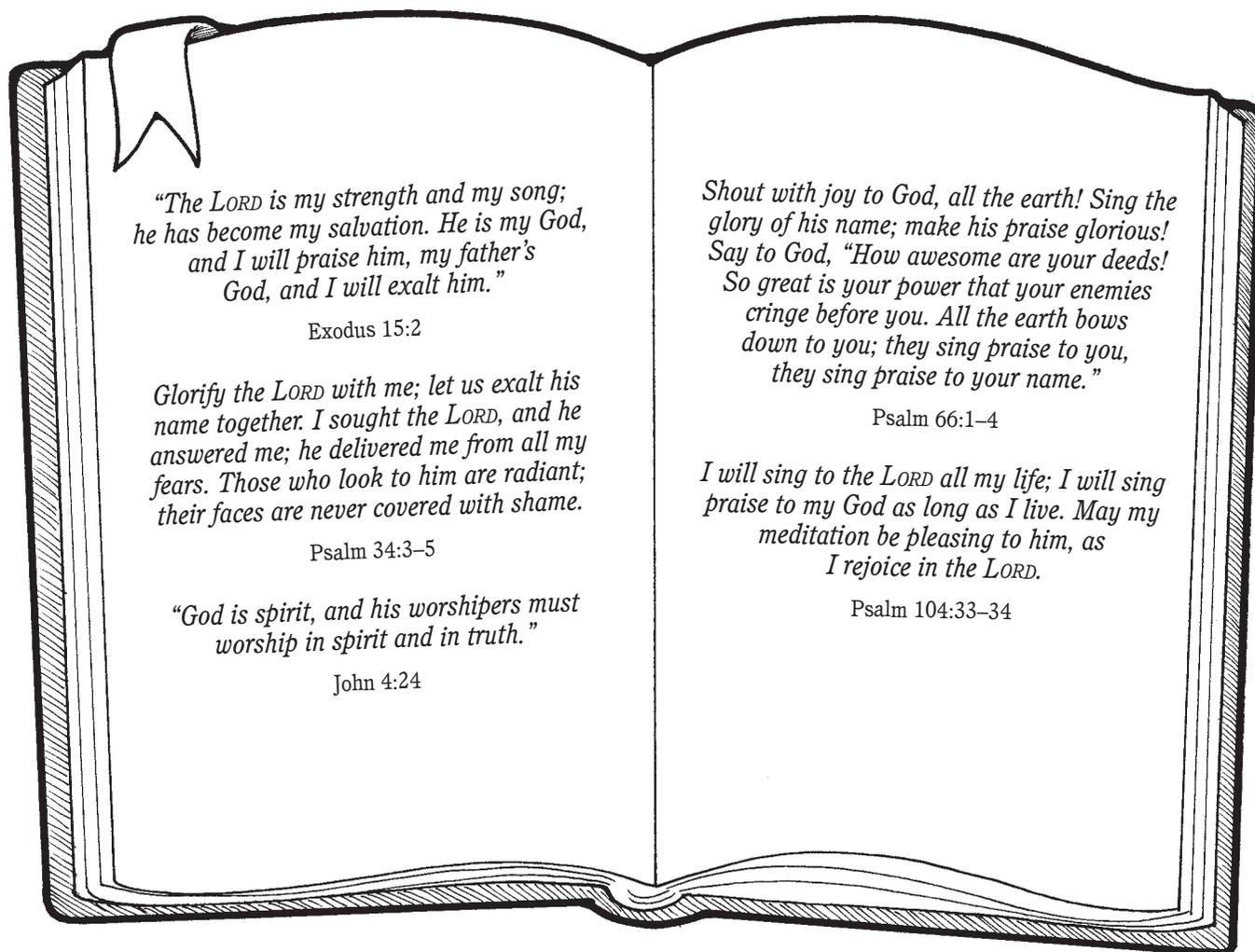
We should go up and say “thank you” to family members or friends when they have done something for us. Sometimes, people are embarrassed easily and they smile or turn red when you show them appreciation. But no matter what their reaction, we have not only shown them gratitude for the way they touched our lives, but we have also touched their lives by recognizing them.

Worship in church is great because we join together as a community to tell God “thank you” for all of the things He has done for us. We should also make every day a day of thanksgiving because He shows us His love, grace, and mercy every day.



## Consider These

Read aloud the following verses about worship. Have older children mark these verses in their Bibles in red to signify that the verses are about worship.



## In-Class Exercise: Praise Walk

This is a fun idea that can be done inside as well as outside. Have children follow you on a walk through the church, school, or outdoors. Begin your walk with an opening prayer like the one suggested for the Prayer Circle (page 33). Stop wherever there are people or things that might inspire children to be thankful. Prompt them if necessary, by saying “God, we give you thanks for . . .” and then name something that they can all see (the chapel, trees, songbirds, etc.). Once all of the children have had a chance to say something for which they are thankful, move on to another location. End at your classroom with another Prayer Circle for a closing prayer.

The benefit of both of these exercises is that they awaken children to many things for which they can give thanks. Hearing other children speak these things in a conversational fashion will hopefully serve as an example that giving thanks to God is not a ritual or a liturgy, but a part of conversation with God.

Both of these exercises also develop children’s ability to express personal thankfulness during a group worship experience—a great spiritual practice for any of us to master.

