don’t have a worship thought prepared for today,” announced a junior pre-service teacher in one of my university methods courses recently. I was puzzled—she had signed up for that time slot weeks before, and the theme for the quarter was well known by all.

“Why not?” I asked.

“I couldn’t think of anything” was the unexpected response from this bright young woman who has many interests and a lively curiosity about how children learn.

As I later worked with this student to build her teaching skills, beginning with modeling another worship/focus event, I put down in writing some of my thoughts about creative classroom worship events based on the approaches used by the Master Teacher.

Jesus taught using creative worship methods that went against the educational paradigm of His day, which involved memorization and repetition of worn platitudes of supposedly superior minds that sought to reinforce the tradition of doing everything as it had “always” been done. Jesus used prayer, lessons from the Scriptures, questions, references to noble believers of the past, object lessons from daily life, His powerful and musical voice, and long walks in the mountains and by lakes to create worship events to ensure that His hearers understood and remembered the lessons He had presented. Jesus awesomely argued, notably nuanced, powerfully pointed, colorfully crafted, and delicately delivered lessons that continue to inspire Christian teachers today. By following His methods, teachers, from preschool to university level, can also create memorable worship events.

When we do worship planning, the types of events we plan and how we implement them are intimately connected to our

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mental organizational processes, as well as to the demands on our time and energy, but they also are influenced by our own connection with Jesus. I have distilled four “rules” from my 45 years of teaching experience, 20 years of reading the Bible completely through, more than 60 years of nature study: (1) Make your worship memorable by standing up for something; (2) Create unforgettable worships by building on something you feel passionate about; (3) Ask high-level questions that require analysis and synthesis; and (4) Integrate service learning into your worship events.

1. Make Your Worship Memorable by Standing Up for Something

A worship thought, or “event” (if more than just a brief presentation), has become a mandatory part of my routine. I use them to start all my classes with pre-service teachers in the university setting. Scheduling the worship event before class helps to focus the students’ and teacher’s thoughts on the relationships in the factual world of implementation, theoretical concepts, and the reasons why these things matter in heavenly terms. Holmes, in his seminal work *The Idea of a Christian College*, posited, “But if a person is at heart a religious being, then all her activities are animated and informed by her faith.” Further, he claimed that “[a]nother educational goal accordingly follows, to teach values as well as facts.” Poe takes this one step further by stating that “[a]ll knowledge is religious.” Assuming this is true, the Christian teacher then has an obligation to make those values and ethical norms known to students.

In other words, Christian teachers need to be intentional and transparent about their embrace of Christian values. This cannot happen, however, until they are crystal clear themselves about what those values are. That clarity comes from spending more time in the Word and with the Author of the Word.

2. Create Unforgettable Worships by Building on Something You Feel Passionate About

I feel passionate about the need to help children connect with God’s revelation in the natural world. One of my strong interests, which has helped me create memorable worships, is natural history. I began to earn my credentials as an amateur naturalist very early, growing up on a farm in North Dakota where I had time to observe the flora and fauna. Gorgeous displays of the Northern Lights were common during the winter. Memories of surviving a three-day blizzard in an abandoned farmhouse with my family became the basis for one of my favorite quilts and for children’s storybooks. Remnants of my father’s extensive rock collection, including a dinosaur bone, are now augmented by my own fossil finds, such as fish coprolites.

Part of a miniature tabernacle set created by the author with the help of primary-age children over a period of 10 years, which has served for worship events for students from 1st grade through university level.
I have raised butterflies and moths from eggs to ethereal flight and have watched the silk-making process from beginning to end. My children had a number of pets through the years (cats, dogs, hamsters, gerbils, frogs, lizards, fish, and spiders), whose adventures became the basis for many worship stories.

Wild birds have provided interesting insights for a variety of worship talks. When the Bible says, “Go to the ant, thou sluggard!” (Proverbs 6:6, KJV), I take it literally, whether I’m photographing them on the island of Borneo or writing about them in Ghana. The entire 10th chapter of *Education* deals with the importance of children learning to see God in nature. Two of my worship events based on lessons from natural history are found in Appendices A and B. Additional worship ideas have been posted on the Web: http://circle.adventist.org/jae/en/jae/20127502Worship.pdf.

There is, however, one caution—even when a teacher has values to share, a passion to do so, and lively visual aids or other object lessons prepared, he or she needs to drive home the educational points by asking appropriate high-level questions that call for analysis and/or synthesis.

3. **Ask High-level Questions That Require Analysis and Synthesis**

As an example of questions that call for synthesis, during a worship event I’ve asked students to choose a rock/mineral from a hand-carved wooden bowl and then to think for two minutes about what that item tells them about God. This same question works well after a quick trip outside to gather flotsam and jetsam from the campus or a nearby lake. (Quick sketches or photos are allowable in lieu of snapping off live flowers or branches.) Spiders that fortuitously appear in my office become worship fodder as we discuss their advanced silk-making process and product and then question how it is possible for a fossil spider with its silk-producing factory already in place to be found within Devonian rock. My seven-stanza poem on this topic is embedded within a PowerPoint on the Web.

Having shared known values in an interesting fashion and asked questions that draw students farther into the learning process as they discuss potential answers is only one element of the value of creative worship events, however. The other part comes when students actually see their teachers *doing/living* what they have taught so creatively.

4. **Integrate Service Learning Into Your Worship Events**

Nothing energizes a classroom like a service project that integrates worship talks, academic learning, and reflection about future events. Glasser maintained that one of the constituents...
of the Quality School was service: “There would be an emphasis on community service, but this service would never be pure physical labor. It would always have an intellectual component—something the students learned in school that they could put to work in the community. An example would be studying the local environment and a plan to correct some deficiency that was brought out by the study so that both the students and the community could profit from what the students had learned.” Martin Luther King, Jr., made a related point: “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’” Students must not be sheltered from real life during their years of Christian schooling—in fact, the two must be integrated in as consistent and as natural a manner as possible. I have developed some ideas for this process in my essay entitled “Heavenly Heuristic: Lessons for Christian Education From the Hebrew Tabernacle.”

So, did my university student benefit from this experience? Let’s just say that the next time she was scheduled to present a worship event as part of a service-learning project for another of my classes, she used suggestion one above, incorporating “gracious professionalism” and her strong interest in LEGO coaching. She asked the children high-level questions to tie the Bible narrative to their own experience as the “Awesome Onions” LEGO-project team and modeled service learning by just
Matthew 6:19-21 (NKJV): “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Even though I like moths very much, having raised many of them from very small wormhood, so to speak, I take the above verses to heart when I see the ugly evidence of moth-larvae damage on wool, silk, and other fabrics. Even though the moths I raised were the type that ate only leaves, I understand that Jesus’ spiritual lesson is incredibly valuable.

Let us enlarge the concept of destroyers of our earthly treasures from the “moth and rust . . . and . . . thieves” to focus on the aftereffects of the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina that overwhelmed the city of New Orleans in 2005. The only person I have met since that time who was able to show me pictures and talk about her losses said that everything she owned was destroyed except her dog and five of her seven cats. Her place of work was destroyed. Her brick house survived the storm but inside, the ceiling tiles sagged downward to rest on the slimy, moldy furniture and rippling blobs of drywall. Papers, books, pictures, clothing, and food were scattered and smeared with mud. Outside, her once-green shrubs and lawn turned a ghastly brownish-yellow, killed by the brackish water of Lake Pontchartrain.

This woman said that as the cold, dirty waters kept rising, until they came nearly to the ceiling of her kitchen, she swam here and there in the filth, grabbing her cats and thrusting them through a hole she had made in her kitchen ceiling. Then she made three desperate attempts to heave herself up through the same hole, falling back twice and nearly drowning. She said she knew that if she didn’t make it on the third try, she wouldn’t have the strength to try again.

Now this survivor of Hurricane Katrina is living with one of her cats in a one-room apartment in Richland, Washington, driving a car donated to her by a local church, sleeping under a quilt made for her by Walla Walla University students, and feeling thankful that her life was spared, along with most of her precious pets. The things she lost simply don’t matter much now.

When we are in heaven looking back, it will be crystal clear which earthly things were of eternal worth and which were a waste of our time, energy, and money—food for moths, so to speak. What constitutes heavenly treasure? Service for children, old people, and others who are unable to do for themselves; working for justice, praying with and for one another; encouraging those who are sad and lonely; sharing our own temporal
and spiritual blessings; studying Bible prophecy and promises with those who are seeking a relationship with God; singing joyful religious songs; telling the world the good news of Jesus’ soon coming—these things cannot be destroyed by moth, rust, thieves, flood, or fire.

For all of us, I pray that our treasures—as well as our hearts—will be in heaven.

P.S. I invited this woman to attend our class with her cat, her pictures, and her story. We gave her a quilt that we had made as a class. We discovered that the thing she missed the most that had been lost in the flood was her great-grandmother’s quilt!

Appendix B—Natural History

Dinosaur Dirge—A Voice Choir for Worship

If I were a dinosaur
And I were trying to run
Away, away, away from the fear
(Echo: Away from the fear . . .)

I would head for the highest hills
Where I see the setting sun
Far, far, far from here
(Echo: Far from here . . .)

I’d flee for my life
For the rocks do stun
Volcanos vomit and heat does sear
(Echo: Heat does sear . . .)

My feet etch a pattern
In a muddy fusion
Of raindrop, blood, and a tear
(Echo: Blood and a tear . . .)

And endless rain does fall
There’s no illusion
The end is near
(Echo: The end is near . . .)

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

4. Ibid., p. 32.
8. See http://www.wallawalla.edu/16242. Note that the program will need to be run as a slide show from the beginning in order for this poem to be read in its entirety.
12. LEGO coaching was an activity I had my Technology Tools for Teachers class (EDUC 315) do for a service project in 2011. Prior to that, I had conducted two sequential pilot studies with an education student and an engineering student from Walla Walla University, taking the LEGO robot to the Farm Labor Homes and having them work with two groups of interested students. The WWU engineering program hosts a regional Seventh-day Adventist LEGO tournament each year (see http://www.wallawalla.edu/academic/areas-of-study/undergraduate-programs/engineering/lego/).