

The Faith that Made Our Worship Hymns

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from Hymn Stories, volumes one and two and from multiple sources)

Open with Prayer

1. Faith That Lights The Way - Col. 3:15-17; Eph. 5:18-20

A. I believe that the majority of people enjoy hymn singing. It helps to edify the audience even if the sermon is dry. Singing reaches the heart and does at least as much as preaching to impress the word of God on peoples' minds. There is more in the Bible about praise than any other single part of our worship.

B. The stories behind the writing of hymns have been a great help to me. I have developed many sermons and invitations based on the faith of the persons behind the writing of Gospel songs. I believe if we see the examples of faith of the people who wrote these songs, we would have a much deeper appreciation and understanding of the meaning of the song with which we praise God and edify one another.

C. Philip P. Bliss was a leading Gospel song writer of the late 19th century who wrote many hymns that are contained in our songbooks still sung by us today. He died in a train accident at the age of 38 on his way home from visiting his mother for the holidays. He got many of his ideas for songs from sermons that he heard. "Almost Persuaded." was developed from a sermon by D. L. Moody. The story is about a violent storm on lake Erie. "On a dark and stormy night when the waves rolled like mountains and not a star was to be seen, a boat, rocking and plunging, neared the Cleveland harbor. 'Are you sure this is Cleveland?' asked the captain, seeing only light from the lighthouse. 'Quite sure sir,' replied the pilot. 'Where are the lower lights?' 'Gone out sir.' 'Can you make the harbor?' 'We must, or perish sir.' With a strong hand and a brave heart, the old pilot turned the wheel. But alas, in the darkness he missed the channel due to the absence of the lower lights, and with a crash on the rocks, the boat was shattered to bits and every life was lost in a watery grave." The preacher concluded with, "Brethren, the Master will take care of the great lighthouse. Let us keep the lower lights burning."

D. #237 - Let the Lower Lights Be Burning

2. Faith That Gives Comfort - Heb. 6:19

A. For example, consider that Fanny J. Crosby, who wrote many of the songs in our book, was blind. In her lifetime, she wrote over 8000 religious songs. Occasionally, a preacher would ask her to write a song specifically designed for his sermon the following Sunday. Often musicians would compose the music, and then bring it to her to compose the words. Mrs. Knapp wrote a musical piece and played it for Mrs. Crosby. When she finished, she asked, "Now, what does this music say?" Mrs. Crosby answered, "Why that says, 'Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.'" And then she sat down to write the lyrics for the rest of the song.

B. #4 - Blessed Assurance

3. Faith That Gives Us Courage - 1Cor. 15:16-20

A. William J. Gaither states: "We wrote 'Because He Lives' near the end of the 1960s when our country was going through the turmoil of the drug culture and the 'God

is dead' theory and also at the peak of the Vietnam War, our little son Benjy was born, at least Gloria was expecting him. I remember at the time we thought that this was a poor time to bring a child into the world. At times we were quite discouraged by the whole thing. Finally he came, and the lyric came to us... 'How sweet to hold our newborn baby and feel the pride and joy he gives, but better still the calm assurance that this child can face uncertain days because Christ lives.' It gave us the courage to say 'Because Christ lives we can face tomorrow' and keep our heads high, and hopefully that could be of meaning to other people.

B. #610 - Because He Lives

4. Faith That Perseveres - Matt. 14:24-31

A. Louisa Stead was born in Dover, England in 1850. In 1879, she and her family went picnicking at Long Island Sound, New York when they suddenly heard cries for help and spotted a drowning boy in the water. Mr. Stead charged into the water. As often happens, the struggling boy pulled his rescuer under the water with him. Both drowned before the terrified eyes of his wife and four year old daughter. Out of Louisa's wrestling with the "why, Lord" during the next few days, she wrote these words: "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take Him at His word; Just to rest upon His promise; just to know, thus saith the Lord. She later remarried a preacher and went with him to South Africa where he preached the gospel.

B. #423 - 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus

5. Faith That Looks Toward The Goal - Rev. 21:3-7

A. James M. Black was a song leader and composer who also taught a teenage Bible class. He gives the following account as to how this song came about: "As the teacher of a Bible class for young people, I met a girl, 14 years old, poorly clad and a child of a drunkard. She accepted my invitation to attend the Bible class with the other young people. One evening at meeting, when the students answered the roll call by reciting a verse of scripture, she failed to respond. I spoke of what a sad thing it would be when our names are called from the Lamb's book of life, if one of us should be absent. I said: 'Oh God, when my name is called up yonder, may I be there to respond.' After services, I thought that I should make that into a song. I dismissed the idea, thinking that I could never write such a hymn. I went home troubled, sat down and wrote the verses in 15 minutes. I went to the piano, played the music and never changed a word or note since."

B. #522 - When the Roll is Called Up Yonder

6. Faith That Accepts The End - Gen. 25:8; 2Tim. 4:6-8

A. Henry F. Lyte was a Scottish preacher who worked with a poor congregation in Devonshire, England for 23 years. During the course of this time, his health grew progressively worse. In August of 1847, he was told by his doctors that he must move to a warmer climate or he would soon die. He wrote the words of this song knowing that he was facing the prospect of his own imminent death. On September 4, 1847, he had to crawl into the pulpit and preached a sermon with the gasping voice of a dying man. His message went thus: "I desire to induce you to prepare for the solemn hour which must come to all by a timely appreciation and dependence on the death of Christ." It was

Henry Lyte, who in spite of his poor health, coined the proverb: "It is better to wear out than to rust out." Lyte left for Rome, Italy for his health's sake, but the trip was too much; he died en route in France.

B. #74 - Abide With Me

7. Faith That Creates A Bond Of Love - Psalm 133

A. John Fawcett was born into a poor family in Yorkshire, England in 1740. He was converted to Christ at the age of 16 and at 26 began to preach. He worked with a congregation in Wainsgate that was small and impoverished. After several years where his salary was meager and his family growing, he was asked to come to the large and influential church at Carter's Lane in London. As the day of the scheduled departure from Wainsgate arrived, with the sad members gathered around the wagons, Mrs. Fawcett broke down and said, "John, I cannot bear to leave. I know not how to go!" Nor can I either," said the preacher. The order was soon given to unpack the wagons. In his next sermon, Fawcett read the text that he had written for this song. John continued preaching for this church for more than fifty years at a salary that never rose above \$200 a year. In 1777, he opened a school for young men who wanted to become preachers. He wrote several books and became the principal at the local school. He remained at Wainsgate until his death by a stroke in 1817. His poem "Blest Be the Tie" was not put to music until 34 years after he died.

B. #302 - Blest Be the Tie

8. Faith That Keeps Us In Awe - Eph. 2:4-6

A. In a small cemetery in Olney, England, stands a tombstone with the following inscription: "John Newton, Clerk, once and infidel and Libertine, a server of slave traders in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the Faith he had long labored to destroy." At the age of 11, Newton joined his father's ship as a seaman. His early years were one continuous round of debauchery and rebellion. After serving on a number of slave ships, he eventually became captain of his own slave trading ship.

On March 10, 1748, returning to England from Africa, the ship encountered several severe storms. Newton began reading Thomas a'Kempis's book "In Imitation of Christ." Between the stormy sea and the message of that book, the seeds were sown in John's life for conversion to Christ. He tried to continue as a slave ship captain, treating slaves less cruelly and holding church services aboard ship for his crew, but he knew that a compromise with evil wouldn't work. He returned home, started a family, and began to crusade against slavery. He worked as a clerk for nine years and then began to preach the gospel in 1764. He often used the story of his early life and conversion with great effect on the hearers, teaching them that the wickedest of men can be redeemed. He wrote this song that we might remember that message.

B. #205 - Amazing Grace

9. Faith That Gives Us Peace - Phil. 4:6-9

A. Edward H. Bickersteth was vacationing in Harrowgate, England and listened to a sermon by a C. Gibbon on Isaiah 26:3. Edward was deeply impressed and moved by the explanation that the original Hebrew text of this verse reads: "Thou wilt keep him

in peace peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." The repetition in Hebrew indicates the idea of absolute perfection... perfect peace. That afternoon, he went to visit an aged, dying relative and found the man deeply depressed and in a disturbed state of mind. With the morning's lesson still fresh in his mind, Bickersteth composed the lines of his new comforting poem and read them to the dying man. From the Hebrew version of "peace peace" came the stanza beginning "peace, perfect peace." The lines of this poem were of great comfort to the dying man as he slipped into eternity.

B. #223 - Peace, Perfect Peace

10. Faith That Ends In Obedience - Romans 6:17-18

A. Daniel B. Towner was leading songs for another evangelist in 1886 during a gospel meeting in Brockton, Massachusetts. One night a young man rose and came forward and said, "I am not quite sure what to do, but I am going to trust and obey." Towner asked his friend, John H. Sammis to take that young man's words and write the lyrics while he wrote the melody. The song has become a favorite with God's people and has been published in many foreign languages around the world.

B. Songs 1 - 9 speak of the blessings we have in Jesus.

C. Song 10 speaks of what we must do in order to receive them.

D. #326 - Trust and Obey

Closing Prayer