

July 15, 2018

Here are the “stories behind the hymns” from this Sunday’s “hymn sing.”

Text: [Psalm 150:1-6](#)

Title: “The Stories Behind the Hymns”

1. “In Christ Alone”

The song “In Christ Alone” is written by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty. Townend spoke *WeAreWorship* about the birth of the hymn. “The song got written in an unexpected way. Keith Getty and I were at a conference together, and a mutual friend said we should get together. He’d said how great Keith was at writing melodies and he probably said some nice things about how I write lyrics, and so we met for a coffee. Nothing particularly eventful happened but Keith said he’s send me a CD with some of his song ideas.

“When it arrived I wasn’t expecting anything much from it. But as soon as I heard the first song — which was just him on the piano, playing the melody in the right hand — I thought there was something about it, something quite profound.

“It was a classic melody, with that eternal, enduring aspect. I was getting to like it more and more and wondering what the song could be about. I thought ‘this is a song about Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and what that means for us.’

“When I started to write the lyrics it got more and more exciting, and I got more and more emotional. I began to try and put into words what it means for Christ to have gone through what He went through, what that means for me and how that completely changes my life.

“I sent the lyrics to Keith and he liked them and he suggested changing the first line. I’d started with the words *My hope is found in Christ alone*, but he thought it would be great if the song began with the phrase *In Christ alone*. I was slightly irritated, but the more I thought about it the more I thought ‘yes that would probably be stronger’, so I moved it around.

“I actually think it was a stroke of genius because now the song is known as ‘In Christ Alone,’ it’s where the song begins, it’s the statement you make and it’s the first thing you sing. So I think that it made the song so much stronger as a result.

18-0715-2

2. “He Touched Me”

This song was the song that propelled Bill Gaither onto the national stage. Gaither had been writing songs for years, but nothing struck the chord with the American public the way *He Touched Me* did. Gaither stated in an interview that he began writing in 1960 and this was “my fifty-fourth song.”

Bill explained in the same interview that he wrote the song during a time when he was accompanying an old preacher friend of his, Dr. Dale Oldham, on some evangelistic crusades. He recalled: “He was a very eloquent speaker. One night after one of those meetings, Dr. Oldham said to me, ‘Bill, the word “touch” is a very popular word. It comes up so often in the New Testament stories about Jesus touching people’s eyes and healing them, or touching people’s lives and changing them. It’s a special, spiritual word and you ought to write a song that praises His touch.’ So I did.”

After the meeting, Gaither, Dr. Oldham and his son Doug were driving back to Gaither’s home in Anderson, Indiana. The conversation turned to how deeply the Spirit of God was felt during the crusade meetings. Gaither was unable to sleep that night. He could not get the last words the ministers said to him when he dropped him off that night out of his mind. The minister said “You should write a song that says, ‘He touched me’ Oh, He touched me.”

Gaither’s mind mulled over the revival meeting and the heavy laden faces he’d seen in the crowd. He thought about how the meeting transformed them to looks of hope and joy by the end of the meeting. The next meeting, Gaither’s wife, Gloria, awoke to find him still working on the song.

Dr. Oldham’s son, Doug, recorded *He Touched Me* in 1964. Gaither recalled: “Doug sang it around in church circles, but I think it really started to get popular as people would take it back to their own congregations and sing it as a chorus. It’s funny, you write 53 songs and then you write on little baby, and even though it comes out of the womb the same way they all did, this baby just all of a sudden goes BOOM!”

The Gaither Trio recorded the song in later 1964. Elvis Presley recorded the song in 1971. After releasing the song as a single, he released the album ‘*He Touched Me*’ in 1972. He received a Grammy Award for this album and was named the Best Inspirational Performance for 1972.

18-0715-3

3. “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)”

The song ‘*Amazing Grace*’ is one of the best known hymns, and most of us know how it was written. The tombstone of John Newton tells his story: “John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slavers 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 so long labored to destroy.” Those words were written by John himself, and they are a testimony to God’s transforming power.

But today we’re going to sing a little bit different version arranged by the contemporary Christian music artists, Chris Tomlin and Louie Giglio.

Tomlin is a popular contemporary Christian musician, worship leader, and song writer, And Louie Giglio is a pastor, author, speaker, and founder of the Passion Movement. They now work together at Passion City Church Giglio and his wife, Shelly, founded in 2008.

Tomlin and Giglio used only the original stanzas one, two, four and six. But there has been added a refrain not in Newton’s original poetry. Perhaps with an eye toward Newton’s former occupation as a slave trader or perhaps speaking of the circumstances and activities of modern living that enslave us to sin, Tomlin and Giglio’s new refrain bursts forth with the triumphant declaration that God, through mercy, love, grace and the salvation of Christ, has removed our chains and sets us free.

Tomlin calls for the refrain to be sung only after stanzas two and three. Please note the wonderful change in the final phrase: stanza four concludes “God . . . will be forever mine,” repeats the statement “will be forever mine,” and then all of a sudden after an entire song of talking about God and God’s amazing grace, changes to direct address: “You are forever mine.” It is the ultimate personalization of a very personal hymn.

4. “We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise”

Kirk Dearman is the writer of this wonderful hymn, and let him tell you the story: “My wife, Deby and I were serving at Shady Grove Church where Pastor Olin Griffing often taught on the subject of worship. We were being taught what it means to worship the Lord.

18-0715-4

One day an outstanding teacher came to the church and taught us what it means to bring a sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. We had never heard of that concept. I then thought to himself, ‘This subject really needs to be in a song.’

“So, as we were driving along the freeway, going home from church on Sunday morning, I began to think how I might write such a song. suddenly, I began to hear this catchy tune in my mind, and within five minutes I had the chorus of a song. I had written it in my head. As we arrived home, I said to Deby, ‘Hey! I have this song,’ and I went to the piano and played and sang it for her. We both liked it and decided to title it “We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise.”

5. “Come and Find the Quiet Center “

New Zealander Shirley Erena Murray is a prolific hymn writer with texts appearing in more than 100 collections worldwide. Her hymns and carols speak to a wide spectrum of themes including the church year, human rights, the care of creations, and peace.

The hymn was written for a retreat setting so it is often used in settings that are in some way set apart from day-to-day life. This hymn will be cherished by those who value quiet meditation and private devotion and by those seeking the calming presence of the Spirit amid a life of “chaos and clutter.”

Most often editors rely on the first stanza, words that speak to our deepest desire for peace in the midst of the storm, but Murray does not stop there. When examining all three stanzas, individually and as a whole, it is evident that finding the quiet center of our being is only the beginning of the journey that she suggests.

6. “The Little Brown Church”

The first settlers came to the Bradford area in 1848 and with an abundant water supply and virgin timber, the town grew. By 1855 the first members of the Puritan-Congregational Church had begun holding meetings. By 1856, Bradford had 500 residents and was the first town in this part of Iowa.

18-0715-5

A young music teacher named William Pitts was traveling by stagecoach from Wisconsin to Iowa to visit his future wife. While waiting for the stagecoach horses to be changed, he walked down Cedar Street and saw the empty lot where the church now stands. Being a romantic young man, the thought came to him of what a charming setting the spot would make for a church. Returning home, he wrote the poem "Church in the Wildwood," and later set it to music. He put it in a drawer and forgot it.

Meanwhile, church members grew tired of meeting in places such as the lawyer's office, abandoned stores and parishioner's homes. They began making plans to build a church. A family in the parish gave them the property. When Rev. Nutting arrived, talk of building became serious. Limestone was quarried and by 1860 the foundation was laid. The Civil War slowed the work, but when one family gave trees and another donated the sawing of the lumber, the work never really ceased.

By 1862 the building was enclosed and not a penny had been spent. When it came time to paint the building, the cheapest paint to be found was Ohio Mineral Paint, which would protect the wood but which was unhappily brown. With help from friends in the east, the building was finished, complete with bell, in 1864.

Meanwhile, Mr. Pitts had married and was living in Wisconsin. In 1862 the couple moved to Fredericksburg to be near her elderly parents and Mr. Pitts was hired to teach singing class at the Bradford Academy. Imagine his surprise when he saw a little brown church nestled in the very trees where he had stood some years before. He went home and found the song and taught it to his class who sang it at the dedication service of the church. Pitts had written a song for a church that wasn't there. The congregation had painted their little church brown without ever hearing of the song!