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# Christian Music

The hymn *Break Thou the Bread of Life* was written by Mary Lathbury while she attended the Chautauqua Summer School and religious resort in New York. She had been asked to write two hymns for the school and this was one of them. The Scriptural basis for her hymn was Matt. 14:19; John 8:32; John 6:35, and Matt. 5:6.

Several Bible doctrines are prominent in this hymn. First, the doctrine of the Word of God and the spiritual bread of life is seen in the first verse. In verse 2, the Word of God is the Absolute Truth. In verse 3 is expressed the believer's love for the Word.

The hymn describes how a Christian experiences great peace when partaking of the Truth, and reveals a thirst for greater truths and deep desires and emotions within the soul.

## The Bible and Music

The Bible deals extensively with the subject of music. In both the Old Testament and New Testament, music played an important part in spiritual worship and was widely used in teaching doctrinal truth to believers.

There are three types of songs in the Bible; Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs.

The word "psalm" comes from the Greek word ψαλμος (**psalmos**), and refers to a Psalm from the Old Testament. Its meaning is derived from the idea of twanging a string on a musical instrument so that it vibrates, hence, it means "to play on a stringed instrument." In the New Testament, the verb ψαλω (**psallo**) it means to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God.

The word "hymn" is from ὕμνος (**hymnos**) meaning "a song of praise to God." Spiritual songs, πνευματικὸς ᾠδὴ (**pneumatikos ode**) are songs that praise, exhort, challenge warn, in the context of the ministry of the Holy Spirit along with the spirit of the Christian believer. The Greek word **ode**, from which the English word "ode" comes, refers to any type of song, a battle song, a harvest song, a festival song, etc. So the term "spiritual" is added in the Bible to limit the type of song used in Christian worship.

1 Cor. 14:12-16, So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual {gifts,} seek to abound for the edification of the church.

Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

What is {the outcome} then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing (**psallo**) with the spirit and I shall sing (**psallo**) with the mind also.

Otherwise if you bless in the spirit {only,} how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?

Note in these verses that the singing is a key ingredient in the ministry of edification, and that it is just as unfruitful to sing without content as it is to speak in tongues to someone who does not understand, since "he does not know what you are saying (singing)."

## Singing in the Local Church

There are two major passages in the New Testament dealing with singing: Eph. 5:14-21 and Col. 3:12-17.

The overall context of Ephesians establishes the following:

Chapter 1 - the truth about the union of a believer with the Lord Jesus Christ

Chapter 2 - Freedom from the Old Testament position of estrangement from Christ.

Chapter 3 - The believer in relation to his own advancement in the Christian life.

Chapter 4 - The believer in relation to the Body of Christ as a whole.

Chapter 5 - The believer's relationship to the body in the local church.

Chapter 6 - The believer's social relationships and the protection of the armor of God.

In Eph. 5:1-17, the walk of the believer is dealt with, and the spiritual condition of the believer is made paramount (5:18).

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Verse 5:19 refers to the spiritual expression of the believer who is growing in Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. Singing is the soul expression of the Christian, who sings in association with other like-minded people. He sings psalms, which are the Old Testament songs. He sing hymns, songs of praise to God. He sings spiritual songs, songs directed to people that praise, exhort, challenge, warn.

In Colossians, the context of chapters 1 and 2 is that we are complete in Christ, and chapter 3 deals with the overt walk of the believer.

Col. 3:12-15 describes the relationship of believers with each other. Verse 3:16 describes the believer with doctrine (3:16a) expressing that doctrine by teaching, admonishing, and singing with grace (psalms, hymns, spiritual songs). Verse 3:17 shows the overall motive and purpose for all activity.

In both of these passages singing is the expression of Christians in a local church and has certain characteristics.

- The person singing is a mature believer, filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18).
- Singing is preceded by “the word of Christ dwelling in you richly” (Col. 3), Bible truth in the soul
- In Eph. 5 singing is an expression of the soul toward God, and the emphasis is on the proper attitude of the soul
- In Col. 3, the singing is an expression of doctrine in the soul expressed toward other people who benefit from it.
- In Col. 3:16, we see the two things that singing accomplishes with respect to other believers in the congregation. It is a teaching tool, and it is an admonishing tool.
- Therefore, singing is used for praise to God, teaching of each other, and warning, encouraging, or exhorting each other.
- In both passages, singing is done “unto the Lord”; although it will benefit the congregation, the Lord will be glorified.

It is very important, as well, to point out what Christian singing **is not**.

- Singing is not the measure of the spirituality of vigor of a local church. The filling of the Spirit is necessary for proper singing; but singing is no proof of the filling of the Spirit.

- Singing in a local congregation is not designed to be used to create a mood for the soul. It is rather an expression of the mental attitude of the soul created by applied Bible truth in a believer who is filled with the Spirit, occupied with Christ, living in the Word.
- Singing is not measured by the amount of zeal employed, but by the understanding that accompanies it. (See above 1 Cor. 14:15).
- Spiritual singing is not designed to give a Christian a good feeling. If it is praise, then it is directed to God. If it is teaching, it is designed for learning. If it is admonishment, it is designed for warning, comfort, challenge, motivation, etc.
- Singing is not the primary function in a worship service. Spirituality and doctrine are the primary issues.
- Singing is not an adequate motive for attending church. The teaching of the Word of God is the only thing that makes singing either valid or meaningful.

### The History of Modern Hymns

Hymns, or odes, have been known from the beginning of written history. A tablet dating 800 BC contains a Sumerian hymn about the creation.

A large number of Christian hymns, some still used today, were written by such early Church Fathers as John of Damascus and Ambrose of Milan. Toward the end of the Middle Ages there again arose a demand for congregational singing, first expressed in spiritual songs and carols. During the Renaissance (1501), the first recognized modern hymn was published at Prague for the Moravian Brethren.

Martin Luther and his followers created a large body of chorales which rank among the finest of congregational hymns today. Under John Calvin at Geneva, the musical reformation developed hymns based on metrical paraphrases of the Psalms, prepared in French and later translated into German for the Reformed Church in Germany.

In England, the hymns of the congregations were limited almost entirely to Psalms prepared by Thomas Steinhold and John Hopkins from 1549 to 1562. These continued to be the most important body of English hymns until about 1696.

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Evangelical hymnology began at the end of the 17th Century. In the Lutheran Church, the Pietist movement started a new wave of hymn writing. In England, John and Charles Wesley began to write what later became the most popular hymns in the English language.

John Wesley's first *Collection of Psalms and Hymns* was published in 1737 in Charlestown, South Carolina. His brother Charles wrote more than 6,500 hymns.

Isaac Watts, another English hymn writer of about the same period, wrote *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707 to 1709) and has been called the creator of the modern English hymn.

Reformation hymns were written with no particular tune in mind. A musician would write music that would fit the meter of the words being sung, and the tunes given to the lyrics were themselves given certain names and designations.

The common ingredient to all hymns of the Reformation churches and the Christian churches that followed was that all hymns were either actual Bible passages or paraphrases of Bible passages.

### Descriptions of Some Familiar Hymns

#### Are You Weary, Heavy Laden

Background: Written by Stephen the Sabaite, a nephew to John of Damascus. John had been tutored by a slave who had later been freed, and both retired to a monastery in the wilderness of Judea. Stephen was taken with them to the monastery, and after the death of his uncle and the slave, Stephen wrote this hymn. It was later recreated by Dr. Neale in 1862 combining the experience of Stephen and himself in the sons.

Doctrines portrayed:

- Eternal rest given by Christ
- Sufferings of Christ portrayed
- Kingship of Christ
- Acceptance of Christ
- Blessings of Christ

Applications: Comfort and fellowship because of the undeserved suffering of Christ. It is a hymn of praise.

Scriptural Basis: Matt. 11:28; John 6:39; Mark 13:31.

#### Beneath the Cross of Jesus

Background: Written by Elizabeth Clephane near the end of her life in 1869. She had a glimpse of her eternal future in a better land and could imagine her footprints leading to that better goal (Dying Grace concept).

Doctrine:

- Christ, the Rock of salvation in a weary land of sin
- The sufferings of Christ for sins
- Unworthiness of man (Grace)
- Blessings received from the death of Christ
- Eternal love of God

Scripture basis: Matt. 27:36

#### Blest Be The Tie That Binds

Background: This hymn was written by John Fawcett who was a pastor in a small Yorkshire village. He was planning to leave his small church and take a larger and wealthier church in London. But he and his wife could not bear to leave the people who were so close to them. So they stayed, and Fawcett wrote this hymn as an expression of the love of the brethren.

Doctrine:

- Christian Love, verse 1
- Prayer, verse 2
- Responsibilities within the Body, verse 3
- Doctrine of Goodbyes and Hellos, verse 4

Scripture: 1 John 1:7; John 13:34,35

#### Breathe On Me, Breath of God

Background: Written by Edwin Hatch in 1886. He wrote from his soul what he imagined that the disciples in the Upper Room had felt when Jesus was speaking to them; he thought that Christ at that time breathed the Holy Spirit on them.

Doctrine: The following doctrinal errors are apparent in this song.

- We do not have to ask for the Holy Spirit. The Spirit indwells us permanently from the moment of salvation. The Spirit fills us upon condition of our confession of sin.
  - The song refers to the filling of the Spirit, but the principle of confession is not mentioned.
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- The concept of the cleansing of the Holy Spirit at confession is confused with the process of edification (Verse 2)
- The issue of outward production in Christianity is confused in verse 3 with the concept of fiery manifestations which showed up only on the Day of Pentecost.
- The song puts the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit as something in the future (verse 4), so it lacks emphasis on the assurance of the believer as having possession of eternal life (see Ephesians 1:13,14)

### Christ the Lord is Risen Today

Background: Written by Charles Wesley out of a desire to elevate man's thinking by the inspiration of poetry. The message is doctrinal application and reveals a sense of victory and assurance which we do not always see in Wesley's somewhat somber background.

#### Doctrines:

- Christ's resurrection calls for men and angels to rejoice
- Death of Christ on the Cross is evidence of His love and that He has won the battle. His resurrection overcame death and provides a release for Old Testament saints. This is correct if it is understood that this release occurs just preceding the Millennial reign of Christ.
- Christ as the King, alive, died once for salvation.
- Salvation is for all who believe (Although Wesley apparently did not believe in universal salvation.)

Scripture: 1 Cor. 15:55-57

### Come, Thou Almighty King

Background: Authorship attributed to Charles Wesley, but real author is unknown. During Revolutionary War days, it was introduced in a Long Island, NY, church by a group of American patriots when a band of British soldiers demanded that the congregation sing "God Save the King." Instead, the church sang "Come, Thou Almighty King."

#### Doctrines:

- Sovereignty of God the Father and the Kingship of Christ, verse 1
- Incarnation of Christ, verse 2
- Holy Spirit, verse 3

- Doctrine of the Trinity, verse 4

Application: This is a true devotional hymn, well balanced to render worship, praise, and self exhortation. It is a prayer of the heart that the three persons of the Godhead may exercise control on the one who is singing, that he may be able to praise God in fullness.

Scripture: Psalm 51:15

### Crown Him With Many Crowns

Background: Written by Matthew Bridges when he and a group of others left the Church of England and joined Roman Catholicism. The original title was *The Song of the Seraphs*, one of the poems found in a volume called *The Passions of Jesus*.

#### Doctrines:

- Verse 1: kingship of Jesus Christ in eternity; the crowning of Christ, victorious and ruling; Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God
- Verse 2: Christ, the son of God in eternity past; Christ, the son of man in time; Christ the faithful high priest
- Verse 3: Christ, the resurrected one; Christ, the one who conquered death of us
- Verse 4: Christ, in a human body, yet glorified; Christ the eternal one worthy of praise for all eternity

Scripture: Rev. 19:12

### Dear Lord and Father of Mankind

Background: Written by John Greanleaf Whittier in 1872, the setting of this song is actually another poem, *The Brewing of Soma*, referring to the brewing of a terrible storm. Whittier wrote this hymn in contrast to the great tumult and destruction of such a storm. It reveals the deep calm and peace which stills the souls of those who hear the message of the Gospel and respond to it in faith.

Doctrine: Bible doctrines are not clearly portrayed in this song...

- The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God is not clear in verse 1.
  - The doctrine of forgiveness is not correctly described. It is portrayed as being asked for rather than as a result of confession of sin.
  - Doctrines of Faith and Obedience are weakly alluded to in verse 2.
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- Doctrines of Peace, Stability, Depression are expressed in a general way in verse 3.
- Misuse of the concept of prayer in verse 4 asking God to manifest some overt expression to teach spiritual lessons through natural phenomena.

Scripture: Ostensibly 1 Kings 19:11,12; Isa. 30:15; Mark 1:17,18; Phil. 4:7

### Fairest Lord Jesus

Background: This is a German hymn written in the 17th Century. Also called the Crusaders Hymn, but there's no proof crusaders ever sang it. Published in America by Richard Willis in 1850. The "fairness" is associated with Jesus as a boy of age 12 and with His growth in wisdom and stature.

#### Doctrine:

- Jesus as Ruler of universe and nature
- Jesus, the perfect Son of God and Perfect Son of Man
- Jesus, greater than the angels
- Doctrine of Salvation which brings joy and gladness to the sinner.

Scripture: Song 5:16; Isa. 60:2,3

### Faith of Our Fathers

Background: Written by Frederick Faber in 1849, probably as a result of being acquainted with many who had died for their faith in Christ. This song has long been a hymn of Christian loyalty and was closely connected with the early faith of the Fathers who found America.

#### Doctrine:

- Faith as a quality that never dies; faith lives on in the hearts of men regardless of the circumstances
- Undeserved Suffering
- Dying Grace
- Evangelization, "winning the nations"
- Liberty, only through the Word

Scripture: Heb. 11:1,13,16; 1 Tim. 6:12

### Glory Be to the Father

Background: Part of this hymn dates back to the time of the apostles and post-apostolic fathers. It is called the Lesser Doxology. The second part was written in 529 AD and is called the

Greater Doxology. Sung in many churches after sermons and prayers and at the dedication of churches.

#### Doctrine:

- Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit
- Praise
- Immutability
- Eternity

Scripture: Jude 25

### Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken

Background: Written by John Newton when he was a slave ship captain. He had been taught the Word of God as a child but he forsook those teachings and became a rough sailor. After a vicious storm at sea, he turned to study the Word again and eventually entered the ministry. This hymn was written in 1779 from this background.

#### Doctrine:

- Verse 1: the Church pictured as a prepared city; the Word of God; the Rock; Salvation and Victory
- Verse 2: Family relationship; Grace
- Verse 3: Leadership; Eternal purpose of God

Scripture: Psalm 87:3; 46:4; Rev. 21:2

### God of Our Fathers

Background: Written by Rev. Daniel Roberts as a U. S. Centennial hymn to be sung on the 4th of July in 1876. This was an expression of praise to God for victory received for our nation and as a memorial to it.

#### Doctrine:

- God the omnipotent Creator
- Divine Institutions; God related to our forefathers
- Verse 2: God related to the leadership of the nation; the basis for law in a nation
- Verse 3: God as national preserver; God's grace and provision
- Verse 4: The Christian Way of Life in trouble, labor, toil

Scripture: Psalm 44:1-3,8

### Hark the Herald Angels Sing

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**Background:** Written by Charles Wesley in 1739. The hymn was revised, and some obsolete words were put into better style, by a Mr. Kelly, Wesley's book steward.

**Doctrine:**

- Verse 1: Christ as King; Peace; Mercy; Reconciliation
- Verse 2: Christ in eternity past; Fullness of time; virgin birth of Christ, Incarnation; Hypostatic Union
- Verse 3: Christ as Prince of Peace; Christ our Righteousness; resurrection; the New Birth

**Scripture:** Isa. 9:6; Luke 2:13,14

**He Leadeth Me**

**Background:** Written by Joseph Gilmore during the darkest hours of the Civil War (1862). He was attending Brown University and Newton Theological Institution and was asked to occupy the pulpit for a couple of weeks at the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia. He wrote this hymn from Psalm 23, which he had given as an exposition at a mid-week service.

**Doctrine:**

- Verse 1: Divine guidance, from the standpoint of comfort
- Verse 2: doctrine of National Disaster and pressure with divine guidance
- Verse 3: One Day at a Time; Status Quo
- Verse 4: Dying Grace; Eternity

**Scripture:** Psalm 23:1-3; Rev. 7:17

**Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty**

**Background:** Written by Reginald Heber in 1827. He attended Oxford University and received honors for his Latin verse. He was the vicar at Hadnet for 16 years and wrote many hymns for special Sundays of the church year.

**Doctrine:**

- Verse 1: Holiness of the Godhead; Worship; Mercy of God; Trinity

- Verse 2: Worship in Eternity; Angelic Worship of Christ; Immutability of God
- Verse 3: Sin and Darkness; sinfulness of Man; attributes of God
- Verse 4: Sovereignty of God; Omnipotence; Creation

**How Firm a Foundation**

**Background:** Not much known about the origins of this song. Possibly written by Robert Keene in 1787

**Doctrine:**

- Verse 1: Completed Canon; Christ as Refuge of the soul
- Verse 2: Fear and its remedy; provision for the believer in time; Omnipotence of God
- Verse 3: Undeserved Suffering and Sorrow; Testing
- Verse 4: Testing; sufficiency of Grace; refinement of faith through testing
- Verse 5: Eternal Security

**Scripture:** Isa. 43:1,2; Heb. 13:5

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<http://www.austinbiblechurch.com>

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There is no charge for Grace Notes materials. The work is supported by Christians who pray for the ministry and share in the expenses.

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