

Songs We Sing

Quotes from “Sing With Feeling, by Robert Jay Taylor, Jr.
1 Corinthians 14:15-17

Introduction: How often have you sung a song without understanding nor appreciating the context of the hymn? There are 702 songs in Hymns for Worship. Would it help if we learned some background on a few of these songs? Our goal will be to better appreciate seven songs we sing from that song book.

I. “When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder” #522

A. James Milton Black was a teacher who befriended a poor neighborhood girl, named Bessie, and persuaded her to attend church. The church where Mr. Black attended was of the custom to call roll. One night, as roll was being called, Bessie did not respond. “Jim’s mind was filled with many troubling thoughts. What if her drunken father had forbidden her to come, or worse yet, had in some way harmed her? What if this young girl would never again be able to answer the roll call?” As it turned out, Bessie missed church because she contacted Pneumonia. Ten days later she had died. James Milton Black wrote this song in time for her funeral service.

B. “There will be a roll call one day. If our name is not found in that book of life, there will not be another opportunity. No hope. The only way to have your name entered into the book of life, is to put on Christ today, and live your life for him” (Rev. 20:12-15).

C. If our attendance at services here on earth is any indication of our service to God, will our names be called from the roll in the Book of Life?

II. “More Love To Thee” #142

A. Elizabeth Prentiss was no stranger to suffering. In the mid 1850’s she lost her oldest son in an epidemic. A short time later, her only other son died. “One evening, she told her husband, “sometimes I don’t think I can stand living for another moment, much less a life time.” George replied, “but it is in times like these that God loves us all the more. Just as we love our children more when they are sick or troubled or distressed.” In her grief she wrote this song.

B. “When grief and tragedy strikes our lives, [we should] draw closer to God by increasing [our] study of His word” (Phil. 1:9-10).

III. "Oft We Come Together" #178

A. Tillit S. Teddlie was a member of the church of Christ. "Mr. Teddlie gives the following account regarding the development of his song "Oft We Come Worship," sometimes called "True Worship" written in 1944. "It's a communion song. I also wrote "When We Meet In Sweet Communion," another communion song and it has been sung since 1923. But I thought we needed a song that was a little bit slower and a little more to the point. This comes a little closer to the spiritual meaning of worship. It covers the complete worship service. And I'll compliment myself and say it's the most complete litle song I ever wrote! I was running a printing press at the time I wrote it and I had to print (many) sheets when brethren found out about it. I mailed it out to them and they pasted it in their song books."

B. True worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

IV. "He Keeps Me Singing" #452

A. "What would you do if tragedy struck you or your family today? What would your response be? If you were required to write down your feelings and thoughts, what would you say? This song, "He Keeps Me Singing" was written by Mr. Bridgers following a tragic personal loss." In 1910, Luther Bridgers was holding a two week meeting as an evangelist in Kentucky. While he was gone, he left his family at his parent's house. He got a call at the end of the meeting that there had been a fire at his parent's home. Not only did his parents die, but his wife and three boys perished in the blaze (John 16:33).

B. As we sing this song, notice the attitude of heart that this tragedy inspired him to write.

V. "The Rock That Is Higher Than I" #367

This song was written in 1873 during a period of great economic instability. In that year, more than 23,000 businesses folded. Erastus Johnson, the author, was touched by the grief and sadness over the financial loss of so many people. He based the song on Psm. 61:1-2 that reflected the attitude of heart at the time.

VI. "Victory In Jesus" #359

A. This song was the last song E. M. Bartlett wrote. He suffered a stroke in 1936, wrote this song in 1939 and died in 1941. When he wrote this song, "he was confined to his bed, never to leave it again. As his earthly body grew weaker, he began to think of heaven and his resurrected body. There he would have no more sickness, so he wrote, "I heard about his healing." He thought about the beauty of heaven and wrote, "I heard about the streets of gold beyond the crystal sea." He looked forward to being released from his pain, and wrote, "And some sweet day I'll sing up there the song of victory."

B. Many spiritual battles are lost when we trust in ourselves. Not so, for those who put their trust in Christ (1 Cor. 15:57).

Conclusion: "What Will Your Answer Be?" #284

A. This song was also written by Brother Tillet S. Teddlie in 1936. He stated, "they told me that the court was in session and the judge was going to pass the death sentence on a young man from Amarillo. He was on trial for murder, accused of killing a mother and her baby, and burying them in a field. Well, I'd never been in a court room where they did that and I thought I would just go and see what it was like. It was just about sundown as I walked in. The judge asked the large audience to rise. I bowed my head while he was giving out that sentence. It just sent a chill through me and the whole audience. You could just feel something terrible. I thought I'd just write something about that... Picture the final judgment, with God on His throne and Christ by his side. You stand there before the great creator, unprepared, never knowing Christ, or worse yet, Christ denies any knowledge of you, as He hands out eternity sentences."

B. Are you ready to give an account of your life (Rom. 14:11-12; Rev. 21:27)?