

Hymns and Songs

*Notes of talk delivered to Main Street Community Church, Frodsham, UK.
Sunday 2 November 2025*

----- 1. Introduction

We sing a lot of songs in church. Most I like, some make me cringe, some I dislike. Many, if we look at the words, speak important things.

As Phil read in Ephesians 5:19-20, he urged his readers to sing, and do so from the heart, and to the Lord.

When I was a lad, at the boys' Bible Class known as Crusaders, fairly early on, I was asked which hymn I liked, and told them. Then they asked me why I liked it. "I like the tune," I innocently answered. "Well," the Crusader leader replied, "I hope you like the words too." "Yes, and the words," I replied with little enthusiasm - but I learned that day that there was such a thing as a right (expected) answer and a wrong answer. What a shame.

But nevermind. Later on, as I began to understand my faith, I began to value and love the words of certain songs too. And I do to this day - though I still find that some of the songs whose words I don't like have wonderful tunes, so I find myself singing them!

--- The value of songs and hymns.

But this sets me thinking about songs and what their value is. I think there are three things, and each adds more aspects.

- » Music - arouses the emotions and aesthetic sense.
- » Songs - arouse those, plus information and expression of meaning, either for teaching and learning, or for worship, or other things.
- » Singing together - arouse all those, plus the social aspect of togetherness and some kind of commitment.

So, singing is very important. Martin Luther, the 'father' of the Reformation, remarked,

"I firmly believe, nor am I ashamed to assert, that next to theology no art is equal to music ... telling the truth in psalms and songs."

In Scotland, Germany and other places where the Reformation took hold, and in the Wesley revivals, songs were used to impart teaching to the people, because many of them could not read or write. So singing the faith was a great way to learn it and remember it. There are several things a song can do:

- » Teaching, reminding

- » Awakening, expressing deep things
- » Worship
- » Prayer

We find these in the songs from last week.

----- 2. Going Through Songs

So, what I am going to do is to go through some of the songs we sang last week, looking at what they say and why.

I remember, during the 1990s, there was a movement, in which we joined, for “cringe-free” services etc. I think it was Gill and Gareth who brought it into the church. Since then, at least, I have always judged songs on how easy they would be for new people to understand. There is a lot of Biblical or Christian jargon in some of them (indicated by Bible references). Those with more might be less appropriate for people who know little Western Christian culture.

--- Before The Throne of God Above

https://hymnary.org/text/before_the_throne_of_god_above_i_have_a
By Charitie Lees Smith

“Before The Throne of God Above” is one of my favourites. And yet it might not be well understood by all who come in from outside, because it is full of Biblical references. Esp. Hebrews 4:14-16.

1. Before the throne of God above Rev. 7:15

I have a strong and perfect plea:

A great High Priest whose name is Love, Heb. 4:14

Who ever lives and pleads for me. Rom. 8:34

My name is graven on his hands, Isa. 49:15-16

My name is written on his heart. -

I know that while in Heav’n he stands Jesus’ authority in Heaven

No tongue can bid me thence depart,

No tongue can bid me thence depart.

2. When Satan tempts me to despair

And tells me of the guilt within, Rev. 12:10

Upward I look and see him there, Stephen, Acts 8:56

Who made an end of all my sin. ??

Because the sinless Savior died, II Cor. 5:21
My sinful soul is counted free,
For God the just is satisfied
To look on him and pardon me, ??
To look on him and pardon me.

3. Behold him there, the risen Lamb, Rev. 5:6
My perfect, spotless righteousness, Phil. 3:9; II Cor. 5:21
The great unchangeable I AM, John 8:58
The King of glory and of grace. (Psa. 24)
One with himself I cannot die;
My soul is purchased by his blood. Acts 20:28
My life is hid with Christ on high, Col. 3:3 "Hid with Christ in God"
With Christ, my Savior and my God,
With Christ, my Savior and my God.

I love these because I know the Scriptures. But someone who
does not might find it less wonderful.

--- **Amazing Grace**

<https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/313>
By John Newton

John Newton was a slave trader. When he was converted, he was
appalled at what he had done, and felt this guilt and horror all his
life. Understanding it depends on a few Bible references, but not
so many.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch; like me! JN appalled by what he did
I once was lost, but now am found, Luke 15, 19
Was blind, but now I see. Luke 18:42-43

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, Softened his heart
And grace my fears relieved; Forgiveness by Christ
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed! His conversion

Through many dangers, toils and snares

I have already come.

'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far

And grace will lead me home.

Grace here is God

Home = next life

The Lord hath promised good to me,

Ps 23

His word my hope secures;

God's word trustworthy

He will my shield and portion be

Psa. 84:11; Lam. 3:24

As long as life endures.

Yes, when this heart and flesh shall fail,

At death

And mortal life shall cease,

I shall possess within the veil

Heb. 6:19

A life of joy and peace.

Beyond death

When we've been there a thousand years,

II Pet. 3:8

Bright shining as the sun,

Dan. 12:3

We've no less days to sing God's praise

Than when we first begun.

--- What a Friend We Have in Jesus

This old favourite has very little jargon, so is very directly understandable, hence a favourite.

<https://www.hopeinthehealing.com/2020/03/24/what-a-friend-we-have-in-jesus-the-story-behind-the-hymn/>

By Joseph Scriven

This hymn has a story behind it. Joseph Scriven grew up in Ireland, went to university in Dublin (at a time when few did), was engaged to married to a lovely young lady. Sadly, the day before the wedding, she was drowned. Heartbroken, Joseph Scriven went to Canada. After time, we was engaged again. Again, his fiancée died - a few weeks before the wedding. Again Joseph was devastated.

He made a vow of poverty and decided to devote his life helping the poor and needy - and obtained great fulfilment from this. But one day he heard that his mother in Ireland was badly ill. He had no money to send to her to help, nor could he travel back to Ireland to be with her. Instead, he wrote this hymn, as a poem,

which he then called "Never Cease Praying". Out of heartbreak.
He never intended it to be published, but the Lord had other ideas,
I think!

What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer

Oh what peace we often forfeit!
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer

Have we trials and temptations
Is there trouble anywhere
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer
In His arms He'll take and shield thee
Thou wilt find a solace there

See how direct and simple it is. How almost anyone could
understand it, and be inspired by it.

--- Faithful One

<https://www.vineyardchurches.org.uk/songs/faithful-one-songteach/>
by Brian Doerksen. CCLI Licence #465840 (c) Mercy/Vineyard Publishing

This is worship. It has several Biblical references.

Faithful one so unchanging I Cor. 1:9

Ageless one You're my rock of peace Psalms 18:2

Lord of all I depend on You

I call out to You again and again

I call out to You again and again

You are my rock in times of trouble Psalms 31:2-3

You lift me up when I fall down Psalms 145:14

All through the storm

Your love is the anchor Hebrews 6:19

My hope is in You alone

--- O Perfect Love, O Perfect Sacrifice

<https://www.invubu.com/music/show/song/Neil-Bennetts/O-Perfect-Love.html>
By Neil Bennetts

This is a love-song to Jesus

O perfect love, o perfect sacrifice, Ephesians 5:2

Fountain of life poured out for me. Psalms 36:9

What heights and depths of heaven's mercy, Ephesians 3:18

The faithfulness that I believe.

And to whom shall I run?

And in whom shall I hide?

Only You hold the truth I desire.

O perfect love, my prayer shall ever be

To be found in Jesus. Philippians 3:9

O perfect love, O perfect mystery,

You were condemned, but I go free.

What truth to know that I can rest upon:

Your perfect love has covered me.

Rom. 4:7

And what can this heart know?

And what can this heart tell?

But of grace that has rescued me.

O perfect love,

My prayer shall ever be

To be found in Jesus.

O perfect love, forever I shall sing

Of heaven's gates flung wide for me.

Where fear of death and tears of hopelessness

Are swallowed up in victory.

I Cor. 15:54

And what praise shall be sung

Still to the Holy One;

To the Saviour, Redeemer and King.

O perfect love,

My song will ever be:

'I am found in Jesus.'

----- 3. Overview

There are three things songs can be about, often in combination:

- » About Me (or us)
- » About God
- » About the Creation, the World, and the Lost.

And about the three dimensions of salvation

- » Being right with God
- » Experiencing God here and now
- » So that we are the ones Creation eager awaits.

All of the ones last week were about Me and God, none about the World or Creation, and especia

----- 4. Final Hymn

We will sing a song written by Timothy Dudley-Smith, which is a prayer to God about the World, about Creation, about the Lost, and so on.

It is especially relevant for those of advanced years; shows what God still expects of us all. Thanks and Glory be to His Name.

--- **Lord, for the years ...**

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
Urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
Sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the word of life which fires us,
Speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
Teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us:
Lord of the word, receive Your people's praise.

Lord, for our land in this our generation,
Spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care:
For young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world when we disown and doubt him,
Loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain,
Hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him:
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord for ourselves; in living power remake us -
Self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
Past put behind us, for the future take us:
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

--- now let us sing that together

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