

A Good Hymn

In June, during one of our church's sharing services, a song, written by Max Boyce, titled *Ten Thousand Instant Christians*, was played, and my ears pricked up at the following words, "...hymns of yesterday, only half remembered; I wonder what He'll say?"

A couple of weeks previously I had been chatting with one of our technical chaps about some of the "hymns of yesterday" we've been singing in recent services, commenting that there were so many great hymns I remembered from my childhood which I would love to sing again, and he suggested that I email him any good hymns I come across, to be stored in their database for future services.

So, what makes a good hymn?...



ONE: A good hymn will be faithful to Scripture. Historically, the words of hymns have been a means of imparting Scriptural truth to believers; so they must be, well, scriptural! The theology of a good hymn will not be imprecise or composed of mix-and-match passages of unrelated scriptures, but will impart clear, sound, biblical doctrine.

TWO: A good hymn will focus on God. That seems fairly basic, and we'd probably say that all hymns focus on God, but the words of a good hymn will be a biblically accurate portrayal of God, using terms, titles, names, and attributes which God uses of Himself in His Word. A good hymn will exalt and honour His Holy Name and extol His ways and His deeds.

THREE: A good hymn will preach the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel: His birth, death, and resurrection, His return to glory, His second coming, His future rule and reign over the whole earth, and our eternity with Him.

FOUR: A good hymn will primarily sing about the Father and the Son, and though it will also sing of the work of the Holy Spirit - His coming at Pentecost, and His living in and guidance of believers - a good hymn will not invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit into a meeting.

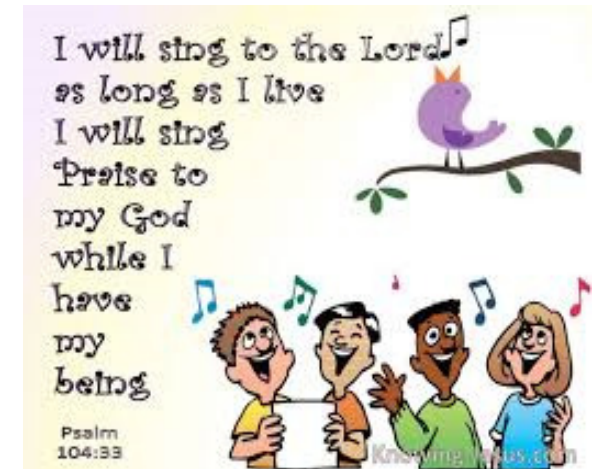
FIVE: A good hymn will not be about me, or my feelings, or my own ideas about God. A good hymn will not oust Christ in favour of His Church - there will be no over-realised eschatology and it will not boast of marvellous

or victorious feats of the Church, but only those of her God. God alone will be the subject of a good hymn, and when believers are spoken of, it will be as the object of God's love for us and mercies towards us.

SIX: The tune of a good hymn will be melodious and harmonious, and the rhythm will not overpower the melody. The tune will not take precedence over the words, and there won't be long musical interludes, because in Scripture it is words which primarily form the worship of God.

SEVEN: A good hymn will be written for congregational singing in a church service; hence both the words and the tune will be easy to learn, follow, and remember. This is because congregational singing is a different genre from music performed on a worship CD - hymn singing is not a performance by an artist(s), but a corporate sacrifice of praise to God by the Body of Christ.

EIGHT: Following from point seven, a good hymn will not be a showcase for anyone's musical talents because the sole purpose of worship is to glorify



God. So there will be no unexpected meanderings or whirly-twirly bits on the part of the writer, singer, or worship leader, distracting a congregation's focus away from the Lord, and leaving them struggling to participate or second guessing what will come next.

NINE: A good hymn will sometimes repeat a line for doctrinal emphasis, but it will not itself *become* repetitive; it will not repeat any lyrics *ad infinitum*; the danger here being that such "vain repetitions" can easily become a mantra moving any worship from the spiritual into the emotional (soulish), and even into the hypnotic.

TEN: In summary, a good hymn will be Scriptural. It will focus on God the Father and on the Lord Jesus Christ; on what He has done for us on the

cross, what He does for us as we walk with Him day by day, and on His eventual return in glory to take us home to be with Him. A good hymn will be rich in sound



doctrine and biblical truth; its words and music will soar our spirits and restore our souls. Its melodies will be simple and beautiful, contemplative and rousing, prayerful and joyful, easily learned and remembered. Finally, a good hymn will enable truly glorious and reverent corporate worship as we raise our voices together to sing praises to our God and Saviour.

May we ever make a joyful noise unto the Lord!

Elizabeth McDonald

25th July 2023

See also the related item [What is Truth? Worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth](#)

(A slightly different version of this item first appeared in the Aug-Oct 2023 edition of the Frindsbury Baptist Church magazine)