

Hymns of the Faith: “Day by Day and with Each Passing Moment”

By [Dr. Bill Wymond](#)

*A Presentation of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi
with
Dr. Ligon Duncan, Dr. Derek Thomas, and Dr. Bill Wymond*

Dr. Wymond: Good morning! This is “Hymns of the Faith,” brought to you by Jackson's First Presbyterian Church. The minister of the First Presbyterian Church is Dr. Ligon Duncan. Stay tuned for “Hymns of the Faith.”

Dr. Duncan: Thank you, Bill Wymond. “Hymns of the Faith” explores the devotional treasures of the ages found in our hymnals. Christianity is a singing faith, because the Lord has put a song in our hearts, and so we live and die singing, as Christians. On “Hymns of the Faith,” we talk about, listen to, and learn from these great songs of the faith. Good morning, Derek!

Dr. Duncan: It's good to be with you again. We've been enjoying a number of hymns, most of them so far from the seventeenth century...that is, the 1600's. We've looked at some outstanding hymns with roots in Germany. We've looked at *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, and If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee... Now Thank We All Our God*. We've looked at a marvelous English hymn that has been called “the second English national anthem,” *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*. And today we're jumping forward. We've been mostly in the 1600's and 1700's, now we're going to jump a couple of centuries forward into the 1900's or into the 1800's, into what's called the nineteenth century, and so we want to look at a hymn that comes to us from Sweden.

It's very interesting. During the nineteenth century (during the 1800's), there was an amazing movement of revival in various parts of the Western world, and Sweden...you wouldn't think of it today, but Sweden actually experienced the effects of that revival as well. And just as a number of outstanding female hymn writers arose in the nineteenth century (in the 1800's) in England and America, so also Sweden had their own outstanding hymn writer, and her name was Lina Sandell. I guess I'm pronouncing that something remotely close to it. Her birth name was Karolina, looking something like our “Carolina” — and Sandell was her last name. She was the daughter of a pastor, and she was apparently fairly frail as a child and had a tragic experience in her young adulthood, which I'll get you to tell us about later.

But the hymn that we're going to look at today is her hymn *Day by Day and with*

Each Passing Moment. Some of you may know another hymn that she wrote, which we will no doubt eventually get around to listening to and studying, *Children of the Heavenly Father*. It's a beautiful little hymn. But she apparently wrote ten, twelve, fourteen hymns that really got into the hearts of the Swedish people.

There was a very famous composer named Ahnfelt who wrote some amazing tunes, and Bill Wymond is going to tell us about this tune that he wrote. But apparently they were a real one-two punch, the texts that Lina Sandell wrote and the tunes that Ahnfelt matched with them. And then apparently a very famous singer and violinist in Sweden sang some of these songs in a way that deeply pierced and affected the hearts of Swedish people all over that land. A lady named Jenny Lind...I'm not sure whether she's kin to the...whoever came up with the culinary product called a Jenny Lind [*laughs*], but at any rate she sang some of these songs and made them very well beloved.

Bill Wymond, you look like you have a thought for us.

Dr. Wymond: Well, just a word about Jenny Lind. She was a phenomenon all over the world, and traveled to America and did recitals here. She was very popular in Britain and on the Continent, and so whatever she endorsed would really get wide approval, because she was so highly respected. "The Swedish Nightingale" was the name that was given to her.

Dr. Duncan: And didn't Lina Sandell say that she had sung her hymns (that is, Jenny Lind had sung her, Lina Sandell's hymns) into the hearts of the Swedish people?

Dr. Wymond: I think so.

Dr. Duncan: Now somewhere I read that she...did she play violin as well? Or am I missing something? I'm going to rifle through my notes and see if I find anything about that.

Dr. Thomas: Well, we're talking now about Jenny Lind, who was a very famous opera singer; a friend (and maybe a little more than a friend) of Mendelssohn. She sang some of the great operatic roles.

Dr. Wymond: And Mendelssohn, I believe, wrote the soprano solos in *Elijah* for Jenny Lind, and had really...

Dr. Thomas: ...and *St. Paul*, I think...

Dr. Wymond: That's right...so they were very close and ...

Dr. Thomas: ...and Jenny Lind came to the States under the auspices of

Barnham, of, I presume, Barnham & Bailey...?

Dr. Wymond: That's right!

Dr. Thomas: ...Made a fortune. Sang, I think, a series of ninety or a hundred concerts in the States and had a very good accountant that insured that she was paid up front before she sang a note, and I think made a good bit of money. But it was this extraordinary woman that also sang these hymns.

Dr. Duncan: Yes. Here's what I'm mistaking from my violin reference, and it has nothing to do with the violin! It has to do with the guitar, and it's Oscar Ahnfelt originally playing these hymns on the guitar and singing them throughout Scandinavia. He's the composer. But then Jenny Lind, this world-famous vocalist, picks them up and begins to sing them and they really catch on. So it's part of the explanation of how these hymns became the phenomenon that they did, not only in Sweden but elsewhere around the world. This world-famous vocalist brought them all over the place.

I think this hymn was translated sometime in the early 1930's. There was a Swedish man who was living in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area named Skoog, and he translated the text of this hymn. I've got a date of 1931, so it must have caught on pretty quickly in the United States in English because this hymn I remember from my youth. And I think it's been used widely in the Protestant world in the United States. Bill, do you have any insights?

Dr. Wymond: Well, interestingly enough for this particular hymn, the first time I ran into it was through my Salvation Army grandparents. The Salvation Army hymnal is rich in its tunes. What a wonderful musical organization they are! And so they first put this in their hymnal, at least to my knowledge, and I think through their influence in England and in the United States got it into the wider hymnody.

Dr. Duncan: It's of the same era as *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*, and so some of the better gospel songs that were circulating in the early part of the twentieth century no doubt made their way into mainstream Protestant hymnals by maybe the middle part of the century, because I think I've seen this in a couple of older hymnals that I've used. I'm not sure...was it in the *Worship & Service Hymnal* at all? How did it come to be used in this congregation, Bill?

Dr. Wymond: Well, it's used in this congregation because it's in our newer hymnal, *The Trinity Hymnal*. It was probably sung as solos here earlier than that, but the congregation first sang it through our new hymnal, which is the *Trinity*.

Dr. Duncan: Well, before I get Derek to tell us just a little bit about Lina Sandell, let me just say that the text is beautiful:

"Day by day and with each passing moment,

Strength I find to meet my trials here...”

So once again we find a hymn speaking of trials. We've seen this over and over in the hymns that we studied of the 1600's and 1700's. This is a testimony hymn. The person who is writing the hymn, the person who is singing the hymn, is giving testimony to the strength that God provides in the midst of trials:

Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment,
I've no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what He deems best--
Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

You can see the sadness and the faith mingled together, just as she speaks of mingling toil with peace and rest. So tell us a little bit about her background, Derek. It may help people understand what she's writing out of.

Dr. Thomas: She is a Swede, born in 1832, and died just at the turn of the century in 1903. She was born Karolina Wilhelmina Sandell, and she was the daughter of a pastor, a Lutheran pastor. And then, this extraordinary event at the age of 26, a definitive point, one that she would never forget and that defines the rest of her life. They are making a journey, she and her father, across a lake in a boat to Goteborg, and her father falls overboard and drowns in front of her eyes. And from that moment she begins then pouring out her soul in these hymns. She writes over 650 of them, all told, and we still know six or seven of them...still familiar.

Ligon and I sometimes tease each other about preferences in musical styles of hymn singing, and I've always liked these particular songs. They're very sentimental, but it's a rollicking good tune, and once the tune gets into your head you can't think of anything else but the words that are married to them—"Day by day, and with each passing moment..." And Bill I'm sure will tell us a little bit about the refrain, a key change that takes place that sort of tugs at your heart. It's because of Oscar Ahnfelt who played his guitar, and the opera singer Jenny Lind, who went apparently all over Sweden and even into factories singing these hymns, Sandell is known as "the Fanny Crosby of Sweden." She did marry; she married a Stockholm merchant by the name of Berg (and that's why she's known as Sandell-Berg), but must have spent the rest of her life pouring out her soul into these hymns.

Dr. Duncan: Bill, tell us just a little bit about the music that Oscar Ahnfelt has provided for this wonderful text.

Dr. Wymond: Well, the music is obviously rooted in the folk song tradition of Sweden. Sweden has a wonderful folk song tradition, and the tunes are simple

and many of them tug at the heart. And I'm fascinated by what makes a good tune! I always talk about that. One of my great emphases is that great hymns have great tunes, normally, and they last through generations because those tunes are not time-bound; and a tune from 300 years ago can still stir our hearts because of certain elements that it has. We've talked about that before and looked at it.

In this particular tune (which is very folk-song-like, I think) there are some interesting elements that make it sentimental and make it tug at the heart, and I have identified at least two of them.

I hope I'm not getting too detailed here, but one of the things that gives emotion to this tune is the simple use of a three-note melodic...what I call "melodic fragments," just like this...[plays notes]. That's the first part of this. Let me just do a little bit of the hymn so that you know what I'm talking about. [Plays first phrase on piano.] That repeats again, but you have these little fragments...made up of three notes...just playing around on three notes like that, and the notes are next to each other. It's not three different notes that are unrelated; these are notes that are in what we call "thirds." One, two, three...three, two, one...and notice that it goes [plays], and then another three-note fragment [plays], the same kind of figure there. And so you have these fragments in thirds that are close together, and it's a warm sound. I notice that when you use thirds in music [demonstrates] and when you use sixths [demonstrates], these are warm sounds to the ear. For some reason, just by the way we are composed, they just happen to strike our ears that way. So thirds are friendly sounds, warm sounds.

And then there's another device that is used in here that adds emotion, and it's common to folk songs, and it's what I call "delayed resolutions" or sometimes they're called *appoggiaturas*, from the Italian word. And you hear them in some of the most sentimental of folk songs, such as the Irish song *Oh, Danny Boy*, and that one goes like this in one place where this delayed resolution happens... [Demonstrates]. And what happens is the tune should, if you follow logic, just go right to the next note, but it delays and repeats a note [demonstrates]. You would think it would go like that, but it goes [demonstrates] and that somehow adds emphasis and emotional appeal, I think.

And this is not just something that is used in sentimental nineteenth century tunes; it was a very big device in the eighteenth century. Handel and Bach used it a lot, and Handel sometimes used it to create drama. For instance, in his *Messiah*, just before the chorus *Glory to God in the Highest*, there is a recitative talking about an angel, saying,

"And suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying....",

and to set up the chorus, "Glory to God and saying" uses this kind of a delayed

resolution. And it goes like this [plays “and say-ing”], so it's a device that was very, very common. And in Handel's *Messiah* they would go back and sing the aria a second time, and they would add all of these delayed resolutions or appoggiaturas to give variety. So it was a very common device. It's a very common device, but it really does add emotion.

Dr. Duncan: Well, you would hear it in Italian art songs, too. *O Solo Mio*, which everybody has to learn when you're first learning to sing...and boy, the tenors and the baritones that sing that will just squeeze that for all they can get as they're singing that!

Let me ask you another thing. In that sort of emotional move when you go into the phrase “He whose heart is kind beyond all measure...” it does feel like the *Danny Boy*, you know, where you've been staying along with the same sort of A-A pattern, and suddenly there's this very dramatic move up. Play it for us!

Dr. Wymond: [Plays phrase, “He whose heart is kind beyond all measure...”] Right there. That's exactly...this is so common in this hymn, and this folk song uses the common device of repeating the phrases [plays] and then it does that again. And then when it wants to get to the heart of the point that's being made, then the melody starts moving up scale just as you suggested...[plays]...that's where it kind of brings everything together in the logical way both musically and verbally.

Dr. Duncan: The text again is a testimony where the hymn writer and the singer is confessing faith in God in the strength that the Lord gives even in the midst of trials; expressing faith or trust in, notice, the Father's wisdom... “the Father's wise bestowment.” Confessing that there is no need to worry or fear, along with the Apostle Paul's injunction to us that we are not to worry about anything because of the Father's providence over us. A confession of the kindness of our heavenly Father's heart: “He whose heart is kind beyond all measure...”; a profession that He gives to us only what is best: “He gives unto each day what He deems best-lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure, mingling toil with peace and rest.”

Notice the confession there that the Christian life always has with it both pain and pleasure, both dark days and joy. And notice how the first line ends: “Mingling toil with peace and rest.” So both of those sides are part of the Christian life, unlike modern sort of “health and wealth” teaching which says that if you're just trusting God everything's wonderful. There is this sound and deep profession that the Christian life both has dark providences and deep joys.

The second stanza of the hymn goes on to profess that “Every day the Lord himself is near me with a special mercy for each hour.” There's a confession there of the Christian doctrine of the special nearness of God. God is everywhere—we all believe that. But the Bible emphasizes that the Lord is especially near to those who love Him, and that's what's being confessed in the

first line of the second stanza...

All my cares He fain would bear, and cheer me,
He whose name is Counselor and Power.
The protection of His child and treasure
Is a charge that on himself He laid;
'As your days, your strength shall be in measure,'
This the pledge to me He made.

And so there's a confession that the person believes what God has said in His word: that He will take care of us. And it's a very powerful testimony.

It's interesting...it has a couple of different effects. On the one hand, it can have the effect of proving a vehicle for a person who already believes this to express it to the Lord in the context of the congregational singing. On the other hand, it could have the effect of a person who believes this encouraging others in the congregation to believe it; or thirdly, it could have the effect of a person who is struggling wanting to believe these things which they know to be true, but which they are having a hard time experiencing in their present situation because of the difficulty of their trials, and so it serves as a vehicle of encouraging them to believe. And so it's interesting how the level of testimony...it can function to express what you're already experiencing, or to encourage others in their experience of God's promises, or to encourage yourself to actually experience what you believe. So again, we're seeing a testimony song here that's very God-centered. Yes, it is written in terms of the first person in terms of me and what I believe, but it's not a narcissistic or self-centered kind of expression of testimony, wouldn't you say, Derek?

Dr. Thomas: There's also something here about the way in which there's a sense of weakness and frailty. It's not overly confident. There's a pining element. The way the hymn closes ends on that sort of minor key...it's very Psalm-like:

Help me, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting,
E'er to take, as from a father's hand,
One by one, the days, the moments fleeting,
Till I reach the promised land.

And I think that that is an element about worship that we need to remember, how in the act of singing itself it becomes then a prayer, a prayer to strengthen me, a prayer to help me.

Dr. Duncan: The posture of dependence ought to be there throughout our Christian worship.

Well, Bill, would you play us this great hymn?

Dr. Wymond: Today singing *Day by Day* for us, Dr. Duncan, is Ben Roberson.
Day by Day.

Day by day and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment,
I've no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what He deems best—
Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

Every day the Lord himself is near me
With a special mercy for each hour;
All my cares He fain would bear, and cheer me,
He whose name is counselor and Pow'r.
The protection of His child and treasure
Is a charge that on himself He laid;
'As your days, your strength shall be in measure,'
This the pledge to me He made.

Help me then in every tribulation
So to trust Your promises, O Lord,
That I lose not faith's sweet consolation
Offered me within Your holy Word.
Help me, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting,
E'er to take, as from a father's hand,
One by one, the days, the moments fleeting,
Till I reach the promised land.

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