

Schedule of Meeting Times:

WKAC 1080 AM Sunday 7:30 AM
Study Sunday 10:00 AM
Worship Sunday Morn 11:00 AM
Worship Sunday Eve 5:00 PM
Singing every 2nd Sunday evening
Study Wednesday 7:00 PM

Preacher / bulletin editor:

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“Bless the LORD,
O my soul, And all
that is within me,
bless His holy
name.”

—Psalm 103:1



Servants during March:

Songleader: Larry (5), Peter (12), Stanley (19), Larry (26)

Reading: Larry

Announcements: Marty

Table: Mike B, Mike M, Peter, Stanley

Wednesday Lesson: Stanley (1),

Kris (8), Larry (15), Stanley (22), Kris (29)

Lawn Mowing (week starting): Kris (3/19), Marty (3/26), Stanley (4/2), Larry (4/9)

Meetings: South Cullman, Mar 19-22, J.R.

Bronger; **Sommerville Rd,** Mar 19-22, Jeff Himmel; **Singing River,** Mar 19-24, Mike Richardson; **Danville Rd,** Mar 26-29, Justin Roberson; **Bethel (TN),** each Monday 7pm, Series: How we Got the Bible, Scott Richardson

Hays Mill church of Christ

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Elkmont, AL 35620

The Bible . Examiner

“Examine everything carefully...” —1 Thessalonians 5:21 NASB

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Hymns and Opportunity Cost

by Matthew W. Bassford

The author is well familiar with his subject, having written the lyrics to numerous hymns with which we would be familiar, such as “Exalted” and “Be Strong and Courageous,” and having collaborated with hymn writers such as Glenda Schales and C.E. Couchman. In addition, the principle of “that which may be adequate versus what is truly good” is applicable to far more than the choosing of hymns.

As a rule, people have trouble understanding the importance of what they can't see. We prefer buying a big-screen TV to saving for retirement, so we benefit from ideas that help us to reckon with the unseen.

Of these, one of my favorites is the concept of opportunity cost. It comes to us from the field of economics, and it argues that in order to properly evaluate a choice, we also must consider what we're giving up. Yes, that TV is right there in front of me, but if I buy it, that's another step down the road that

leads to me spending my golden years eating dog food. We have to give what we can't see equal weight with what we can see in order to decide whether the visible is preferable.

There are any number of possible applications of this rule, but when it comes to the things of the spirit, I think it is most relevant in the realm of hymnody. Over the past 25 years, I've learned that I can talk about good hymns all I want, but as soon as I say, “This is a bad hymn, and we shouldn't be using it,” somebody will rise up to argue with me.

During those discussions, I've often gotten the sense that we're arguing about two different things. Generally, those who disagree with me consider hymns absolutely: “This is a song about God, and it doesn't teach false doctrine, so we ought to be singing it.” I, on the other hand, tend to look at hymns

comparatively. It's a rare hymn that truly has zero spiritual value, so that's not a terribly useful analysis. Instead, I ask, "Are there other hymns that we could be singing that would be more beneficial right now than this one?"

Of those two ways of thinking, the second takes opportunity cost into account, but the first doesn't. This is a problem because no hymn exists in a vacuum. Rather, it exists as part of a centuries-old tradition of hymnody, and it is competing with hundreds of years of good and even great hymns for a spot in our repertoire. Every time we sing Hymn X, all the other hymns we could have sung are the opportunity cost.

Consider, for instance, the praise song "Sanctuary" (I'm already notorious for complaining about it, so I might as well complain some more.). If "Sanctuary" were the only sacred song we could sing, yes, obviously we should use it in our worship all the time. Any spiritual benefit is clearly better than no spiritual benefit.

However, that's not the case. Every time we sing "Sanctuary", we're crowding out all other hymns, and hundreds of those hymns are more spiritually useful. Indeed, many of them explore similar topics (to the extent that "Sanctuary" explores any topic, at least).

One such is "Purer in Heart, O God". It doesn't have a fun-to-sing descant like "Sanctuary", but "fun to

sing" isn't a Scriptural goal for our song worship. "Teaching and admonishing" is, and by any standard of comparison, "Purer in Heart, O God" has more to say than "Sanctuary".

Vastly more. In our porn-saturated age, the appeal, "Keep me from secret sin," is probably enough reason to use the hymn all by itself. If we can't sing that with feeling, we have serious spiritual problems.

Nor does the Biblical goodness end there. The whole hymn is built around a Beatitude, Matthew 5:8. Along the way, it provides an expanded definition of what purity of heart means. Purity of heart is about devoting ourselves to God. It's about keeping ourselves out of trouble and listening to God. It's about obedience from the heart. It's about being guided by and abiding in Him.

If, with His help, we do all these things, we get to see Him as He is (note the connection here to 1 John 3:1-3). When we sing "Purer in Heart, O God" with the spirit and the understanding, we get a whole sermon's worth of edification out of it.

Suffice it to say that there is no sermon in "Sanctuary". Well, at least not a good one.

As a result, the question can never be about "Sanctuary" in isolation. It is about "Sanctuary" versus "Purer in Heart, O God" and other equally worthy hymns, all

competing for that precious slot in our order of services. If such hymns are the opportunity cost, can "Sanctuary" ever be the best choice?

Because I've been at this for a while, I know perfectly well how the counterargument will go. Somebody will say, "You just want to compile a list of the 10 best hymns and sing those over and over again!" The problem with the argument is that choosing hymns isn't like choosing players for a fantasy-football team. You can't boil down a hymn to a numerical score that allows you to assign it a place in an objective ranking of hymns. All of us have perspectives on hymns that are shaped in part by our own subjective opinions and tastes.

Similarly, some hymns become more useful because of their timeliness. They have a message that is suited to the needs of the moment. In such circumstances, a hymn may even be optimal, clearly better than any other choice. For

instance, if the song leader wants to choose a hymn to precede a sermon on Lamentations 3, he ought to lead "Great Is Thy Faithfulness".

All of these things make hymn selection more than a mere mechanical exercise. I can't dictate to song leaders what they should lead, nor would I want to. There is certainly judgment involved.

However, there is also such a thing as bad judgment, even when it comes to hymns. Judgment that forgets the Biblical goals for our worship is bad judgment. For that matter, judgment that forgets the circumstances of a given time of worship is bad judgment. "Purer in Heart, O God" has a lot to say, but if no one in the congregation has seen the hymn before, its teaching potential will not be realized.

In short, considering a hymn in isolation is never a good idea. We must always ask if we would be better off singing something else.



Remember in Prayer

Hazel's son-in-law, Shane Reed, is hospitalized with leukemia, and is not doing well. **Mike Beckman** has results from his test, and has been referred to an oncologist. **Joyce** still deals with cancer, as well. **The Pollard's newborn, Paige**, is expected

to be transported to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore when her condition stabilizes, but no date is set, yet.

Buddy is back home and doing some better! Let's continue to pray for **Carolyn, Betty, and Dot**.