

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:

Kris Vilander, (256) 472-1065

E-mail: kris@haysmillchurchofchrist.org

Website: www.haysmillchurchofchrist.org

“...do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord,”

—Ephesians 5:18,19



The Bible . Examiner

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

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How to Write Hymns The Super-Brief Version

by Matthew W. Bassford

Servants during August:

Songleader: Peter (6), Stanley (13),
Larry (20), Peter (27)

Reading: Larry

Announcements: Marty

Table: Stanley, Mike M, Peter, Marty

Wednesday Lesson: Kris (2), Larry (9),
Stanley (16), Kris (23), Larry (30)

Lawn Mowing (week starting): Kris (6),

Marty (13), Stanley (20), Larry (27)

Hays Mill church of Christ

21705 Hays Mill Road

Elkmont, AL 35620

This evening, as on every 2nd Sunday, we plan to sing together! Many of us would like to write a song that would glorify God and encourage brethren, but don't know where to start. This short tutorial was written by an author of many excellent modern hymns, examples of which can be found in our "Hymns for Worship" supplement, and in the hymnal, "Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs."

When we set out to write a hymn, we first must make sure that our work helps Christians to achieve God's goals for their worship. One of these goals appears in Colossians 3:16. Here, we learn that our singing must arise from a rich indwelling of the word so that it teaches and admonishes our brethren.

In other words, hymns must have **CONTENT**, much like a sermon or Bible class must have content. All other things being equal, the more content in a hymn, the better. This is true not only of hymns that are clearly didactic, like "Take Time to Be Holy", but also of those that express thanksgiving or praise. In the book of Psalms, even psalms of praise are rich with teaching about God and His wonderful works.

Similarly, Ephesians 5:19 reveals that in our song worship, we must speak to **ONE ANOTHER**. In the Lord's church, singing is not for a soloist, a band, or a choir. Instead, it is for ordinary Christians. All of us are equally

engaged in the work of teaching and admonishing.

This tells us, then, that hymns must be adapted for the understanding and musical abilities of ordinary worshippers. They have to be simple and straightforward in their language and consistent in following patterns. If they are not, this will distract the congregation and prevent them from singing with understanding.

Music that is too difficult or complicated also is a distraction. Often, this is a problem with sacred songs written for professional singers and arranged for skilled choruses. They sound wonderful in performance but tax the abilities of the ordinary people in the pews. My rule of thumb is this: if a group of people from your congregation who like to sing can't learn your song from the sheet music in 10 minutes, it's probably too complicated.

When you are writing for the congregation, complicated is bad and patterns are good. In particular, there are three kinds of patterns that are significant in writing hymns: rhyme, meter, and rhythm.

The use of **RHYME** adds structure to a hymn and sets it apart from prose. Repetition and

writing in parallel can also be structural elements, but they come with problems. Unless repetition is exceptionally powerful, like in Psalm 136, it detracts from content. Parallels must be extensive and strictly followed to provide enough structure.

Rhyme is much more flexible, but in the rhyme-poor English language, it is not easy. Beginning writers are tempted to use false rhymes, like "Lord" and "word", but these easier rhymes come at the cost of structural strength.

True rhymes, like "guide" and "side" or "creation" and "salvation", make a hymn coherent. The great old hymns that have remained in use for centuries frequently provide examples of how to use rhyme powerfully. This is not coincidence!

Also, watch out for the temptation to use clichéd, worn-out phrases, like "precious blood" / "crimson flood", at the ends of lines because they rhyme. They may use biblical language and concepts, but they put the brains of worshippers to sleep. Look for original rhymes that enhance rich content instead.

When writing hymn texts, **METER** does not refer to musical

meter. It refers instead to the number of syllables in each line of a hymn. In formal hymns, these syllable counts follow a pattern, and some of the most frequent patterns have names. For example, "Amazing Grace" follows a pattern of eight syllables in the first line, six in the second, eight in the third, and six in the fourth, which is 8.6.8.6 in metrical notation. This meter is called common meter, or CM.

Regular meter that is established early and followed consistently is important in congregational hymns because it permits a predictable relationship between words and music. This allows untrained singers to sing confidently anyway because they can anticipate what comes next.

Finally, **RHYTHM** in hymn texts has little to do with musical rhythm. Instead, it is about the regular "bounce" of syllables when the text is read. This bounce

should follow—you guessed it!—a pattern, like weak-strong or strong-weak-weak.

Regular rhythm matters because it ensures that strong words and syllables will fall on the strong beats in the hymn tune. Irregular rhythm, by contrast, leads to the emphasis of words like "the" or emphasizing the wrong syllable in a multi-syllable word. Misplaced emphases catch the attention of singers and distract them.

There is much more that could be said about the craft of writing hymns, but these are the essentials. For most, learning to work within these constraints is frustrating and time-consuming. No English-language writer has ever mastered the art of hymnody. However, if we humbly, patiently, and prayerfully apply ourselves, we may by the grace of God write something that will help His people glorify Him. 

Remember in Prayer

Please continue to pray for those you know and love that don't share our fellowship with God, 1 Jn 1:1-4; as well as those that do, but are physically unwell, Jas 5:16—including **Betty; Carolyn; Dot; John, Sylvia, and Paige Pollard; Joyce;**

Mike, Deborah, and Serenity; Pam and Julie. Remember also brethren suffering persecution here or abroad, 2 Thess 1:11; and those proclaiming the truth, Col 4:3. ...And pray for those that mistreat you, Lk 6:28. 