

Higher Ground

By Maggie Moller

“But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.”
(1 Peter 1:15 NIV)

“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”
(Colossians 3:2)

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
(Hebrews 12:2)

When Nathan announced the topic for this newsletter was going to be “Holiness,” Dad leaned over to me right away and jokingly said, “I wonder what you’ll write about?” He was inferring that my hymn selection seemed to be a no-brainer choice of “Holy, Holy, Holy.” However, I have already written an article* themed around that beautiful hymn on the holiness of God, so I faced the task of finding another hymn focusing on the theme “Holiness.” As I prepared to start the process of research, I asked my dad if he had any suggestions for me. He suggested “Higher Ground,” and I think this is an excellent hymn for focusing on “Holiness.”

The Lyricist – Johnson Oatman, Jr.

Johnson Oatman was born on April 21, 1856, in New Jersey. He was blessed to receive an education, and at the age of 19, he was ordained a minister within the Methodist Episcopal denomination. He served in local churches for his entire life alongside working full-time in insurance and retail fields. Throughout his life, he penned the lyrics for 5,000 Gospel songs. He passed away on September 25, 1922, at the age of 66.

The Composer – Charles Hutchinson Gabriel

Charles Gabriel was born on August 18, 1856, in Iowa. His parents were farmers by trade, so he spent his early years living a country life on an Iowan farm. While he was growing up, he taught himself to play the family’s reed organ and discovered his love and talent for music. He began to thrive with his music, and by age 16, he already had a strong reputation as a teacher and composer. He eventually moved to San Francisco, where he served as a music director at Grace Methodist Episcopal Church for two years. He then moved to Chicago and in 1912 started work at Homer Rodeheaver’s Publishing Company. Throughout his career, he wrote men’s chorus books, anthem collections, and cantatas. He also edited 43 song books before passing away at the home of his son, Charles Jr., on September 15, 1932, at the age of 76.

As I worked on this article, I read over the words to “Higher Ground.” I was struck by the wonderful message and application this hymn has for me, especially at this point in my life. I

have recently been struggling with the concept of all the distractions we face in life that draw our attention and focus off of Jesus Christ. I think this is one of Satan's ways of attacking us and weakening our relationship with our Lord. When we are focused on all that is going on around us and don't turn it over to Christ, we are not growing in our relationship with Him; in fact, I would say we are actually creating a distance between us and the Lord. It also causes us unnecessary worry because we are striving to bear our burdens in our own strength. I know in my own life I need to make a daily, conscious decision to stop myself when I start to let the distractions of life drown out my thoughts of Christ. These distractions aren't even necessarily bad thoughts or activities, but when anything other than God becomes our focus, it can become harmful to our relationship with our Savior. This hymn reminds me of this need to keep reminding myself to pray that Christ would fix my eyes on Him. It also reminds me of my daily need to be conformed more into His image and likeness. Neither of these two can be accomplished on my own but only through prayer and spending time in His Word. He will not turn us away when we make a conscious effort to put Him first in our thoughts each day!

I have experienced this first-hand this week. I was so encouraged by His love for me this week with two answers to seemingly small, insignificant prayers. He delights in providing even the smallest things for us, and it is a joy and encouragement for us to see Him do so! He is so good! We serve a wonderful, PERSONAL God who knows exactly what you need.

So, I hope this has served to encourage you to fix your focus on Christ and thrive in the goodness of His amazing love for you – His child! I want to close with one of the verses from the hymn that really impacted me. I hope it is as encouraging to you as it has been to me.

*I want to live above the world,
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;
For faith has caught the joyful sound,
The song of saints on higher ground.*

Sources:

Cyber Hymnal Website
NIV Bible

*My article titled "Holy, Holy, Holy" can be found in the April 2013 issue of the Berean Lamp newsletter or on the website at www.bereanlamp.org