

Blessed Assurance

By Maggie Moller

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

(Hebrews 10:22 NASB)

“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

(Hebrews 12:2)

As I thought about what hymn to write on for this month’s newsletter on “Contentment,” my mom suggested “Blessed Assurance.” I think this hymn fits perfectly with the chosen theme. Knowing we have “blessed assurance” of our relationship in Christ, we can be content despite the trials life will contain (Hebrews 10:22). True contentment can be attained when we put our entire trust and hope in God’s goodness and love. If we are seeking fulfillment and happiness from anything but God, we will never gain true contentment in this life. The two women who composed the lyrics and music for this hymn both faced many trials in this life. However, they were content despite the trials because they were not seeking happiness from this earth. Rather, they were looking beyond the life on this earth to the next, which contained all the glory of their Risen Lord! I hope their stories touch you as much as they have touched me as well as encourage you to look heavenward when the struggles of this earth tempt you to take your eyes off Christ and His love (Hebrews 12:2).

Frances “Fanny” Jane Crosby – The Lyricist

Fanny Crosby was born on March 24, 1820, in a small village outside of New York City to John and Mercy Crosby. When Fanny was only 6 weeks old, she became very sick and developed inflammation in her eyes. Her parents summoned the aid of a doctor who concocted a salve to treat her eyes. However, much to her parents’ dismay, the doctor was a fraud, and the salve served only to permanently blind their young baby daughter. Later that same year, Fanny’s father died, leaving his young wife alone with their blinded baby daughter.

Mercy and her mother, Eunice, raised Fanny and taught her the importance of a life dedicated to the service of the Savior. With her grandmother, Fanny worked diligently to memorize five chapters of the Bible each week, so that by the time she was 10 years old, she could recite from memory the four gospels as well as the Pentateuch, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and many Psalms. Due to her blindness, her grandmother believed it was important for Fanny to know the Scriptures by heart so she could have the Word of God despite her inability to read the Bible.

When she was 15, Fanny enrolled in the New York Institute for the Blind (NYIB) where she received her first musical training. During the eight years she was a student at the Institute, she learned to play the organ, piano, harp, and guitar, and she became a soprano singer. After graduating from NYIB, Fanny joined the faculty and taught for two years before her marriage to fellow teacher Alexander Van Alstyne. Alexander, called “Van” by his friends, was also blind. Fanny took her husband’s last name for legal purposes but continued to use her maiden name on her hymns.

The Van Alstynes had one daughter, Frances, in 1859. Sadly, shortly after her birth, their little baby died in her sleep. After this, Fanny and Van’s marriage was never the same. Van’s attitude became very distant and left Fanny feeling alone. She wrote the hymn “Safe in the Arms of Jesus” in an attempt to process the death of her daughter. Fanny never spoke publicly about being a mother or of her daughter; the topic just brought too much pain. Despite the growing distance in her married relationship, Fanny

never spoke badly of Van and continued to reach out to him despite their often separate lives.

As Fanny continued to write hymns, publishers began to worry that the public might not approve of so many hymns by the same writer within their hymnals. To ease this concern, Fanny began writing under more than 200 pen names to disguise the fact that she was the author of most of the popular hymns in the hymnals.

“Blessed Assurance” was composed around 1873. One day, Fanny was visiting her dear friend Phoebe Knapp, who had just purchased a new organ. Mrs. Knapp was eager to show her friend the new instrument, so she began playing part of a new song she had just composed. When she had finished, she turned to Fanny, who said, “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!” The two worked together until three verses and a chorus had been added to Mrs. Knapp’s composition.

The simple statement proclaimed by Fanny that became one of our most famous hymns is a true testament to the way she lived her life. She was wholly devoted to the service of her Lord and loved Jesus with her entire being. Most of her life, she lived in poverty simply because she gave every cent away to charities and the less fortunate. She knew her treasure was not to be found on this earth but awaited her in Heaven. When asked once how she felt about her blindness, she responded, “It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank Him for this dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered to me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me.”

Fanny died on February 12, 1915, at the age of 95. Her tombstone was inscribed with the words “Aunt Fanny – Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.” At her funeral, her friend and fellow hymn-writer, Eliza Hewitt, read a poem she wrote in honor of Fanny that contained phrases and titles from many of her hymns; a fitting farewell to the woman who influenced the music of our faith so deeply.

Fanny Crosby can justifiably be dubbed the most impactful hymn-writer of all time. In her lifetime, she can be credited with writing nearly 9,000 hymns, most of which have stood the test of time and remain popular today, 100 years after her death. A person would be hard-pressed to find a hymnal without at least one of her hymns within its pages. She has been titled the “Queen of Gospel Song Writers,” as well as the “mother of modern congregational singing in America.” I can hardly do justice to the wonderful testimony of the life story of Fanny Crosby in this short article. But I hope this short account has encouraged you and perhaps even peaked your curiosity to study Fanny Crosby’s life further.

Phoebe Palmer Knapp – The Composer

Phoebe Palmer Knapp was born on March 9, 1839, in New York City to Walter and Phoebe Palmer. Her parents were Methodist evangelists, so from a young age, Phoebe was taught the importance of living a Godly life. When she was just 16, she married Joseph Knapp, a wealthy businessman. Mr. and Mrs. Knapp attended the John Street Methodist Church in New York City, where Phoebe met and befriended Fanny Crosby. When her husband died, Phoebe was left with a large amount of money, most of which she gave to charities. Her one pleasure was her large pipe organ, which she used to compose the music for over 500 hymns. Mrs. Knapp died on July 10, 1908, at 69 years of age.

Much can be learned from the lives of these two women of faith. Each one faced many trials in their lifetime, but in their darkest hour they found contentment in the arms of their Savior. I am ashamed of how often I allow myself to dwell on my trials rather than trust Jesus to see me through. I am also often disappointed when I reflect on my contentment in life. I have to daily pray for the Lord to grant me contentment in Him alone and not from my earthly circumstances. Little by little the Lord is showing me that He is enough for me. I do not need the things the world says are necessities of happiness. We can face the darkest hours of our lives and yet remain content if we rest in the love of our Lord and trust

Him to see us through! He will never fail us, and He is always more satisfying than the earthly things we thought our happiness was dependent upon.