**2017 HYMN WRITERS STORIES**

**John Newton portrayed by Roman Czujko**

**Hymn: *Amazing Grace***

Good evening. My name is John Newton and, though I hate to say it myself, I wrote the most popular hymn of all time, *Amazing Grace*.

But before we sing that hymn together, I need to tell you something about my life—something I’m not too proud to share with you. I was born in London in 1725—about the same time all the ruckus was starting up over here in the colonies. I had a Christian mother and a father who was a sea captain. My mom died when I was seven, so I went to work with my father on the ship. I got into trouble many times. And when I was old enough, I went to work for myself on a ship, trading slaves. I’d go to Africa and bring them back to England.

But one stormy night in 1748 my life changed. I was thrown overboard by a violent storm. There, in the middle of the ocean, struggling to live and not drown, I knew things just had to change. I can’t tell you exactly why, but something—someone—spoke to me. After I was rescued from the water, things started happening. I went home and fell in love with a wonderful Christian woman, Mary Catlett, and then someone gave me a copy of Thomas Ã Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*. I gave up the slave trade and the same week heard a preacher who turned my life around: Charles Wesley. I was so moved by his preaching and the reading I was doing that I decided to follow Christ and I entered the ministry. Yes, me!

This hymn is my profession of faith. It’s my story. It’s how God’s grace can rescue all of us from sin—even though we aren’t deserving of this grace. God’s grace, shown to a blind sinner like me, was nothing short of amazing.

Most hymnals attribute the tune of the hymn to an early American folk melody. But it would be more honest to say that the melody originated as the tune of a song the slaves sang.

In my later life, I became an Anglican priest at St. Mary Woolnoth in London. Among my parishioners was William Wilberforce, who became a leader in the campaign for the abolition of slavery. I continued to preach even when I lost my eyesight. I thank God that even though I was once an infidel and led a degenerate lifestyle, God saved my soul and called me to proclaim God’s grace through Christ.

Let us sing the hymn Amazing Grace.

**Thomas O. Chisholm portrayed by Jack Colvis**

**Hymn: *Great Is Thy Faithfulness***

My name is Thomas Obediah Chisholm. One of my favorite Bible verses is from Lamentations chapter 3, verses 22-24. This is what it says: “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.  They are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness.  The Lord is my portion, says my soul, Therefore I hope in Him!”To me, this passage of scripture reminds me that you don’t need to be rescued from life-threatening danger or see God’s miraculous provision in the direst of financial crises to truly know the faithfulness of the Lord.  God remains faithful day in and day out in the largest and smallest of circumstances.

I wrote the hymn Great Is Thy Faithfulness as a testament to God’s faithfulness throughout my very ordinary life.  I was born in a log cabin in Franklin, Kentucky and became a Christian when I was twenty-seven. I entered the ministry when I was thirty-six, but my health was so poor I was forced to retire after just one year. During the rest of my life, I spent many years living in New Jersey and working as a life insurance agent.  Still, even with a desk job, I wrote nearly 1,200 poems and 221 hymns throughout my life, including several published hymns such as *Living for Jesus, Prepare to Meet Thy God,* and *Trust in the Lord*.

You know, over the course of my life, my income was never large because I was limited by my health impairment that began when I was a young adult and followed me on until now.  Although I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God and that He has given me many wonderful displays of His providing care, for which I am filled with astonishing gratefulness.

Just think, with each new day, God gave me the chance to prove His faithfulness.  And my life, He’s never once been proven wrong, for His mercies are new every morning, no matter what.

As you join in the singing of the hymn, *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*, I invite you to think of God’s goodness and faithfulness to you all along your life’s journey.

**Frances Ridley Havergal portrayed by Elizabeth Brooks Evans**

**Hymn: *Take My Life***

I am Frances Ridley Havergal and many know me as the "consecration poet," because I tried to live a life fully consecrated to Christ and to those I saw in any physical or spiritual need.

I was born in 1836 and my spiritual journey began early in my life. I was memorizing passages in the Bible at age 4 and writing verses by age seven. I was nurtured in the faith by my father who was an Anglican clergyman. He just loved Christian hymns.

Though my health was very frail I learned several modern languages as well as Hebrew and Greek. I was a devoted Bible student, and memorized much of the New Testament as well as the Psalms, Isaiah, and the minor prophets. I was also a singer of some note and known as an accomplished pianist.  I loved to compose hymns and wrote, *I Gave My Life for Thee*, *Like A River* *Glorious, Lord Speak to Me and Is It for Me*? One of my most famous hymns, *Take My Life* , was written in 1874: Here is how it came to be:

I went for a little visit of five days [to Areley House]. There were ten persons in the house, some unconverted and long prayed for, some converted, but not rejoicing Christians. He gave me the prayer, "Lord, give me all in this house!" And He just did. Before I left the house everyone had got a blessing. The last night of my visit after I had retired, the governess asked me to go to the two daughters. They were crying, etc.; then and there both of them trusted and rejoiced; it was nearly midnight. I was too happy to sleep, and passed most of the night in praise and renewal of my own consecration; and these little couplets formed themselves, and chimed in my heart one after another till they finished with “Ever, Only, ALL for Thee!”

Each stanza explores more deeply what it means to surrender to Christ. The first stanza consecrates the singer's life and moments, as well as physical body -- hands and feet.  The second stanza is somewhat autobiographical in light of my vocal abilities, consecrating my voice and lips. The stanza continues with personal possessions, silver and gold, as well as intellect.  The final stanza explores those personal attributes at the very core of one's being -- will, heart, love and self.

I lived what I preached in my hymns. In 1878 I wrote to a friend, "The Lord has shown me another little step, and, of course, I have taken it with extreme delight.” Take my silver and my gold now means shipping off all my ornaments to the church Missionary House, including a jewel cabinet that is really fit for a countess, where all will be accepted and disposed of for me. . . . I don't think I ever packed a box with such pleasure.

Please join me as we sing, this hymn of consecration as our invitation to offering this morning. As we sing, the ushers will come forth to receive our tithes and offerings for the Lord. Let us sing, *Take My Life and Let it Be.*

**Thomas Dorsey portrayed by William Pailen**

**Hymn: *Precious Lord***

I am Thomas A. Dorsey, known as the “Father of Gospel Music.” I was born in rural Villa Rica, Georgia in 1899. My family moved to Atlanta where my father worked as a laborer and served as a Baptist preacher on Sundays. My mother was a domestic worker and the church organist and she taught me how to play the piano when I was 7. I left school when I was eleven to take a job at a local vaudeville theater. Six years later, I left Atlanta and became part of the Great Migration of southern Blacks to the north. In Chicago, I found success almost immediately. I was known as the “whispering piano player,” and performed at after-hours parties where I had to play quietly enough to avoid drawing police attention.

At twenty-one, my hectic and unhealthy schedule and lifestyle, caused me to have a nervous breakdown. One night, onstage, I noticed an "unsteadiness" in my playing. The unsteadiness grew worse, leaving me unable to practice, write or perform. This persisted for two years. I visited doctors, sought treatment, took time off. Nothing worked. I even considered suicide. Then, I began to think more seriously about my faith. I sought the wise counsel of Bishop H.H. Haley. He told me, " Thomas, there is no reason for you to be looking so poorly and feeling so badly. The Lord has too much work for you to let you die." From then on, I vowed to do the Lord's work.

I began developing sacred music based on the secular blues. It featured syncopated notes in an eight-bar blues structure; but instead of themes of defiance in the face of despair - the theme most common in the blues - this new music told stories of hope and affirmation. I described my music as "good news on either side." The first gospel song, I wrote was entitled, *If You See My* *Savior Tell Him That You Saw Me* which was published in 1932. By then I was beginning to experience success as a composer and performer.

Around this time my wife, Nettie, was about to bear our first child. I was called to St. Louis to sing at a revival. On the first night of the meetings, a lad brought a telegram with horrible news. It informed me that my wife had died giving birth to our son. I rushed home, and when I arrived I found my wonderful baby boy was seemingly fine, and yet, that night he also died. I buried my wife and little son in the same casket.

I became very despondent and filled with grief. A few days later I visited with my good friend, Professor Frye. We walked around the campus of Annie Malone’s Poro College for a while and then went into one of the music rooms. I sat down at a piano and began to improvise on the keyboard. Suddenly, I found myself playing a particular melody that I hadn’t played before that time. It was an adaptation of George N. Allen’s melody used with the old hymn, *Must Jesus Bear* *the Cross Alone?* As I played I began to say, “Blessed Lord, blessed Lord, blessed Lord.” My friend walked over to me and said, “Why don’t you make that precious Lord?” I then began to sing, “Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand.” When I finished , I titled the song, *Precious Lord, Take My Hand*, we began to use it and it has been going ever since. I have gotten letters from people all over the world. It was a great tragedy, but we got the message to the world. Though I have written 300 hymns, *Precious Lord* is by far, my most well-beloved hymn. It has been translated into more than 30 languages and has comforted many souls.

**Adelaide Pollard portrayed by Maggi Lindley**

**Hymn: *Have Thine Own Way, Lord***

Did you know that many of your best loved hymns have been written by women, and many of the world’s best hymn writers were humble folks whose lives were devoted to the cause of making the world a better place to live?

That’s certainly true in my case. My name is Adelaide Pollard. I was born in Bloomfield, Iowa on November 27, 1862 and my given name was Sarah but I didn't like it and adopted Adelaide in its place. Like my mother, who wrote hymns during the Moody-Sankey era, I dedicated my entire life to the cause of furthering the Christian faith.

After training in Chicago, I taught in several girls' schools and then became active as a Bible teacher, evangelist and healer, but, my true heart’s desire was to be a missionary and I set out to secure my funding to go to the mission field. When I was about 45, I became extremely discouraged about what I thought was my calling. One day as I sat in the pew, floods of doubts and disappointments cascaded over me. I had weathered setbacks before in my life, but this setback was the most crushing and personal. How I had hoped and planned to go to Africa as a missionary! I had felt so burdened for the dear people of that continent. And now, just as I was going to set sail for Africa—I had been unable to raise enough financial support; and all my hopeful plans were sadly cancelled.

I was deeply disheartened and felt distress in my soul. But as I sat in church that night, despondent and disappointed with God and myself, an elderly lady was praying nearby. As I heard her pray, two sentences lodged themselves in my mind. The elderly woman prayed, “It is all right, Lord! It doesn’t matter what You bring into our lives; just have Your own way with us!” The reverent woman’s joyful submission and desire for God’s will rather than her own struck me deeply. As I pondered upon the woman’s prayer, I suddenly realized that my own burden was lifted! As I submitted to God’s will, I found peace.

Words began to come to my mind, growing stronger and more sure as I returned home, mulling over this new and wonderful insight. Later that evening when I read about the potter in the book of Jeremiah, the simple story resonated within me: “Then I went down to the potter’s house, and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it” (Jeremiah 18:3–4).

The truth that God sometimes has to break and change the pattern of our lives in order to fix flaws that we have—that if we are trying to shape our lives, He often has to break us so that He can re-mold us into His pattern—became real to me that night. That evening I wrote down the words that were becoming the song of my heart: “Have Thine Own way, Lord! Have Thine Own way! Thou art the Potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after Thy will, While I am waiting, yielded and still.” My own struggles, discouragement, and heart’s cry was voiced in the third verse: “Wounded and weary, Help me, I pray! Power—all power—surely is Thine! Touch me and heal me, Savior divine!”

Once I realized that God wanted me to seek His will for my life, not my own, God sent me to Africa for a short period! I may have thought I was giving up Africa and future dreams of ministry when I penned, *Have Thine Own Way, Lord.* But, in reality, I was not. In God’s perfect timing, He sent me there Himself.

I spent a short time in Africa until the outbreak of World War I which made it necessary for me to flee to Scotland. In later years, I returned to the United States. But wherever I was, I filled my time with service to God.

I invite you to sing *Have Thine Own Way*, meditating of the promises of the Lord, to lead us every step of the way, when we yield to his will and his way for our lives.