



THE HYMNS THAT SHAPE US

WEEK 3 – *O God, Our Help in Ages Past*

OPENING PRAYER

God of all creation, of the music that moves us and the hymns that shape us, thank you for the gift of worship. Thank you for the ways you have met us in spaces of praise and lament. We ask now that your Holy Spirit would be at work in our hearts as we continue to meditate on your goodness to us. For it is in the name of Jesus Christ, our coming King, we pray. Amen.

CHECK IN

Invite folks to check in with one of these two questions:

- 1) **After singing “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” this past Sunday, were there things you noticed or experienced differently in worship?**
- 2) **Was there one thing brought up in the interview with Derek that particularly resonated with you or confused you?**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Take a look at the hymn page attached to this study guide. Read the words aloud.
Are there particular phrases that stick out to you? Comfort or confuse you?

1 O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home;

2 under the shadow of your throne
your saints have dwelt secure.
Sufficient is your arm alone,
and our defense is sure.

3 Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received its frame,
from everlasting you are God,
to endless years the same.

4 A thousand ages in your sight
are like an evening gone,
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

5 Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
soon bears us all away.
We fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the op'ning day.

6 O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
still be our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home.

- 2) Read Psalm 90 and reflect on the way it carries themes of eternity and God’s sovereignty. Our smallness in the face of God’s majesty, and this hymn seeks to capture that difference. The faithfulness of God in the midst of suffering and uncertainty is one of the central promises of this psalm, and this hymn.
- **What do you think the Psalmist was feeling as he was writing this prayer/song? Is there an image or phrase that stands out to you?**
 - **As you consider your life, or more specifically, this year of Covid, have there been times when you’ve experienced this? Times when you’ve recognized how great God is and how faithful?**
- 3) This hymn is sung in many different settings – baptisms, funeral, weddings, Sunday morning worship. It’s been sung during some of the most difficult and tragic events of our country’s history – Revolutionary War, Civil War, Great Depression, World Wars, 9/11, and now 2020 and Covid. This reminds us that God has been our help and will continue to be our help.
- **Does this hymn strike you in a different way this year, in the midst of Covid, than it has when you sang it before?**
 - **What about this hymn might provide comfort?**
 - **Why do you think it has withstood the test of time so well?**
- 4) “O God, Our Help” is sometimes called “OUR God, Our Help”. This was a choice made by the Methodist hymn writer, John Wesley. Derek and Sarah talk about how that small change can affect the way we sing this hymn.
- **Why do you think Wesley would change this?**
 - **Do you have a preference for one over the other?**
- 5) Derek talks about how Isaac Watts wrote with simple words. He often wrote children’s hymns and the language he uses is much different than that of other hymn writers. Look at the words to “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” and “Crown Him with Many Crowns”.
- **Watts would be criticized that his language was childish, do you agree? Do you prefer “fancier” language or does the simplicity comfort you?**
 - **Can you name a line or two in the hymns below that resonate with you? Are there some verses/words that seem too lofty to be meaningful?**

1 Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne.
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless king
through all eternity.

2 Crown him the Lord of life,
who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife
for those he came to save;
his glories now we sing
who died and rose on high,
who died eternal life to bring,
and lives that death may die.

3 Crown him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above,
in beauty glorified;
no angels in the sky
can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends their burning eye
at mysteries so bright.

4 Crown him the Lord of years,
the potentate of time,
creator of the rolling spheres,
ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
for thou hast died for me;
thy praise shall never, never fail
throughout eternity.

1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

2 Unresting, unceasing, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might,
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and
love.

3 To all, life thou givest, to both great and small.
In all life thou livest, the true life of all.
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish, but naught changeth thee.

4 Great God of all glory, great God of all light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight.
All praise we would render; O help us to see
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.

- 6) Has your perception of “O God, Our Help in Ages Past” changed at all as you’ve learned more about it? What might be one “take away” for you this week as you anticipate singing this hymn in worship on Sunday?**

CLOSING PRAYER

Take time to offer prayer requests before closing together in prayer. If you would like, you can also read a portion of this week’s hymn or psalm as the closing prayer.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Psalm 90

God's Eternity and Human Frailty A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.

¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place^a
in all generations.

² Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the
world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are
God.

³ You turn us^b back to dust,
and say, "Turn back, you mortals."

⁴ For a thousand years in your sight
are like yesterday when it is past,
or like a watch in the night.

⁵ You sweep them away; they are like a
dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning;

⁶ in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.

⁷ For we are consumed by your anger;
by your wrath we are overwhelmed.

⁸ You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your
countenance.

⁹ For all our days pass away under your
wrath;
our years come to an end^c like a sigh.

¹⁰ The days of our life are seventy years,
or perhaps eighty, if we are strong;
even then their span^d is only toil and
trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.

¹¹ Who considers the power of your anger?
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due
you.

¹² So teach us to count our days
that we may gain a wise heart.

¹³ Turn, O LORD! How long?
Have compassion on your servants!

¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your
steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our
days.

¹⁵ Make us glad as many days as you have
afflicted us,
and as many years as we have seen evil.

¹⁶ Let your work be manifest to your
servants,
and your glorious power to their children.

¹⁷ Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon
us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands—
O prosper the work of our hands!

Footnotes

- a. Psalm 90:1 Another reading is *our refuge*
- b. Psalm 90:3 Heb *humankind*
- c. Psalm 90:9 Syr: Heb *we bring our years to an end*
- d. Psalm 90:10 Cn Compare Gk Syr Jerome Tg: Heb *pride*



O God, Our Help in Ages Past

1. O God, our help in a - ges past, our hope for years to come,
 2. Un - der the shad - ow of your throne your saints have dwelt se - cure;
 3. Be - fore the hills in or - der stood, or earth re - ceived her frame,
 4. A thou - sand a - ges in your sight are like an eve - ning gone;
 5. The bus - y tribes of flesh and blood, with all their lives and cares,

our shel - ter from the storm - y blast, and our e - ter - nal home:
 suf - fi - cient is your arm a - lone, and our de - fense is sure.
 • from ev - er - last - ing you are God, to end - less years the same.
 short as the watch that ends the night be - fore the ris - ing sun.
 are car - ried down - ward by your flood, and lost in fol - l'wing years.

6. Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
 bears all its sons away;
 they fly forgotten, as a dream
 dies at the op'ning day.

7. O God, our help in ages past,
 our hope for years to come;
 O be our guard while troubles last,
 and our eternal home.

From Psalm 90
 Isaac Watts, 1719
 Alt. 1990; mod.

ST. ANNE C.M.
 Attr. to William Croft, 1678-1727
 Tate and Brady, *Supplement to the New Version*, 1708

