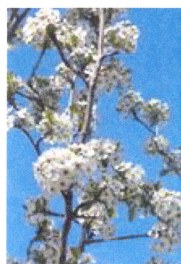


# Today, While the Sunshines

March Hymn of the Month

Just as picturesque scenes can bring peace and calmness to the soul, so does beautiful music

## The Hymn



In most areas of the world there are optimal times for planting crops and pruning, and if the time is missed, the harvest will fail or not be as successful. The

same principle holds true in other areas of life, and the hymn "Today, While the Sun Shines" has a great message on this topic.

The text has multiple layers of meaning. The word "today" is both a noun and an adverb and can be interpreted literally as the 24 hours between this morning's sunrise and tomorrow's, or figuratively as the current period of time. The opening phrase, "Today, while the sun shines, work with a will.." is a literal reference to farming, where work has to be done when the weather is conducive. This can be likened to other areas such as seasons of life, where there are limited windows of opportunity for things like gaining education, having children, taking employment, etc. Most significant is the application of the analogy to the spiritual work of salvation, personal development and service to the Lord. In this context, 'today' can be seen as a mortal lifespan, wherein we prepare for eternity.

The style of the text is not a strictly traditional hymn, defined as 'a song of praise to God,' but it has doctrinal basis in exhortations from the Lord in regard to gospel living and duties. The theme of the hymn is found in the words of the Savior as recorded in the New Testament, "I must work the works of

## The Author



There is no biographical information known to be available for L. Clark.

A hymn with similar text believed to be by L. Clark and credited to a Presbyterian Hymnal was published with music by Nicholas Doubt in the 1904 "Service Hymnal." (See photo above, from Hymnary.org.) It seems likely that the hymn text that served as the basis for this publication may have also been the catalyst for the LDS version.

Evan Stephens was a poet and hymnwriter as well as a composer, and was said to have been his own librettist for many of his works. It seems logical that he would have been the one responsible for the text adaptation that fits so well with the lively tune he composed. A tune well suited for singing or whistling as accompaniment to the daily duties described in the hymn.

It is interesting to note that the origin of the word "today" is the Old English "to dæge," meaning, 'on (the) day.' Until

## The Composer



Evan Stephens was born to David and Jane Stephens in June of 1854 at Pencader, Carmarthenshire, Wales. Pencader is a small rural village located in

southwestern Wales. Evan was said to be the tenth child in the family, and was reported to have been small and sickly at first. Having lost the two infants that preceded him, his parents were undoubtedly glad to see him survive.

The family was hardworking but poor. It is understood that they were tenant farmers, as was common in the area. The children contributed to the family income by working in the fields as soon as they were able, and hiring out as they got older. As a result, the children received little formal education. It is believed that Evan's mother taught him to read from the Bible in Welsh by the time he was six.

Wales became subject to the English King in 1283 and was incorporated into England in 1543. In spite of this, the Welsh people persisted in maintaining their language and culture. Although Evan was taught in English at the village school, it is said that he could read and understand English but could not converse in it. He inherited natural gifts from literary progenitors that compensated for lack of formal education, however, along with the Welsh culture of musical and literary emphasis.

At the age of ten, Evan was required to quit school and go to work tending cattle and sheep. His older brothers had found work in the coal and iron industries that

him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

The concept of duty, defined as 'morally obligatory tasks, conduct, service and function,' was given much more widespread emphasis in previous generations than it is today. The highest duty we have is recorded in the Bible, "...Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." The hymn speaks of fulfilling our daily duties with patience. What daily tasks and conduct are we morally obligated to perform, (our duties) and how are they connected to the commandments of God?

It is instructive to consider the duties of family members as found in The Ten Commandments. It seems apparent that in accordance with the hymn text we will "...seek for goodness, virtue and truth," and "...live to be true, constant and faithful..." if we are striving to love the Lord and have no other Gods, to honor our father and mother, to keep the Sabbath holy, to not take the Lord's name in vain, not steal, lie, covet, commit adultery or kill.

The hymn text also contains additional lines with scriptural connections. Possible Biblical references are listed below with the associated hymn text in parentheses following. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." "I am the good shepherd... there shall be one fold and one shepherd." (The peace and the joy that are found in the fold.) "For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be..." (While here we labor, choose the better part.) "...Be of good cheer; it is I, be not afraid." (Today while the birds sing, harbor no care; call life a good gift, call the world fair.) "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things..." (Today seek the gems that shine in the heart...)

the sixteenth century it was written as two words, as seen in the title of the early edition above. It then began to be hyphenated until the early twentieth century when the common form became one word.

Whatever form the hymn by L. Clark originally took, we can be grateful it provided a basis for "Today, While the Sun Shines." This instructional and motivating hymn has benefited generations past and present.

## "Today, While the Sun Shines"

Text as found in the 1985 LDS Hymnal

Today, while the sun shines, work with a will;

Today all your duties with patience fulfill.  
Today, while the birds sing, harbor no care;  
Call life a good gift; call the world fair.

Today seek the treasure better than gold,  
The peace and the joy that are found in the fold.

Today seek the gems that shine in the heart;  
While here we labor, choose the better part.

Today seek for goodness, virtue, and truth,  
As crown of your life and the grace of your youth.

Today, while the heart beats, live to be true,  
Constant and faithful all the way through.

Chorus:

Today, today, work with a will;  
Today, today, your duties fulfill.  
Today, today, work while you may;  
Prepare for tomorrow by working today.

were booming in southern Wales at that time.

The Stephens family were reported to be a devout Christian family with several Independent (or non-Church of England) ministers in their line. About 1849, Dan Jones, a native Welsh missionary of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) began serving in the area, and was reported to be instrumental in teaching the Stephens family. Most of the family were converted and baptized. Later the small branch of the church met in their home while Evan's father served as Branch President.

Evan was baptized in 1863 at about the age of nine, in a local stream, and from his infancy had heard of the family's plan to emigrate to the United States to join with the main body of LDS church members in Utah. It is said that his older brother saved enough money from his employment to send one of their sisters with a group of emigrating church members in 1863 and followed himself the next year. Later that year the family received some funds from these two siblings along with money from the church's Perpetual Emigration Fund, which along with some borrowed money allowed most of the family to take their journey. Three adult children remained behind.

They departed in May of 1866 taking a train to Liverpool where they boarded a ship with several hundred other emigrating church members. After a five week voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, they traveled by steamboat and train to Wyoming, Nebraska, the launching point for immigrant wagon trains. The transcontinental railroad was not yet completed. They were required to wait a few weeks for wagons and oxen to be procured, and then departed on the first of August for Utah with the Rawlins company.

Is is recorded that twelve-year old Evan walked all the way and found the journey to be an experience of pleasure. They had challenging encounters with Native

The 'fold' mentioned above is the short form of 'Sheepfold,' the protective enclosure used by Biblical shepherds, and is symbolic of the protection found in living the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as well as that found in belonging to the Church he organized. This reminds us that while we are in charge of our own spiritual growth, the Lord encourages us to be part of His Church, where we can strengthen each other and have greater opportunities to serve him and be blessed ourselves. All the things mentioned above can be experienced in church activity.

Our hymn was published with the title "To-day" in the September 15, 1877 edition of the 'Juvenile Instructor,' which at that time was the Sunday School magazine of 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (LDS). The music is credited to Evan Stephens, no author is shown. The tune is titled CONSTANT. (The original publication can be viewed at [lds.org](http://lds.org).) It was included in similar form in the 1894 Edition of 'Deseret Sunday School Songs.' In these early versions, there is a separate part in the tenor line of the chorus.

Titled by its first line, "Today, While the Sun Shines," our hymn appeared in the 1948 Edition of 'Hymns, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (LDS Hymnal). The hymn continued in the 1985 LDS Hymnal with the music transposed to a lower, simpler key, and the time signature revised from common to 6/8, with simpler rhythm notation. The text in this edition is credited to L. Clark, with alterations. A few minor changes were made to the text between the 1948 and the 1985 LDS Hymnals. In the second verse, "... good part" was changed to "...better part." In the last phrase of the chorus, "There is no tomorrow, but only today," was changed to "Prepare for tomorrow by working today," to clarify the message of the hymn and belief in eternity.

American warriors, river crossings and a snowstorm, but fared well, arriving in Salt Lake on the first of October.

The brother and sister that had preceded them were living in Willard, Utah, about fifty miles north of Salt Lake City, a small farming community located on a narrow bench between the mountain range and the Bear River Bay of the Great Salt Lake. It is said that the established siblings were tenant farming and had no home of their own but brought their parents to the new home they had found, an abandoned one-room log cabin from which they drove rattlesnakes and tarantulas.

Life in the pioneer community had many challenges, and it is noted that the family arrived with almost no money. Young Evan was hired to herd sheep for a neighbor, and the other siblings found jobs also. The community amusements consisted of dances and literary societies. The community also had a school which Evan is said to have attended sporadically.

At the Sunday church services, a young Welshman who directed the ward choir is said to have lit the musical fire which led Evan Stephens to his future accomplishments. It is reported that on a visit to the family's second home, Evan was heard singing in the cellar, accompanying himself with milk pans filled with varying amounts of water. The choir director invited him to sing with the choir and asked him to learn the alto part under the tutelage of one of the men. The men in the choir treated him with love and kindness and he became very attached to them.

Evan borrowed choir books and began to study. An older brother who had remained in Wales, immigrated to join the family in 1868 and brought music books with him which he was also able to study.

At the age of fifteen, Evan traveled to Salt Lake City to attend the general conference of the church, and heard the Tabernacle Choir and the organ, which sparked an

"Today, While the Sun Shines" is essentially a Sunday School lesson in song, note the reference to "youth," and is good therapy for procrastinators of any age. It is a great reminder that fulfilling our daily duties with the right attitude of love for the Lord leads to enduring happiness.

interest in the organ in addition to the choir.

Evan participated in a singing class and in 1870, his brother bought a small cabinet organ which Evan learned to play. His interest in music deepened and he began to learn to compose. It is noted that these activities took place after each full day of hard labor. He worked for a mason and had chores at home.

About this time, his parents and older brothers had an opportunity to homestead about sixty miles north near Malad, Idaho and moved there. Evan was about sixteen at the time and did not want to leave his friends. He remained in Willard, living with a friend's family. This turned out to be a crucial decision for his future, as the Willard choir and several other outlying choirs were invited to sing with the Tabernacle Choir at general conferences of the church in October of 1872, and again in 1873.

At the age of nineteen, Evan was asked to take the place of the ward choir leader and prepared the Willard choir to participate with others in the October 1873 general conference. Their success buoyed his enthusiasm and confidence. He read everything about music he could and was inspired by great choral works. He organized classes of singing students and composed and presented musical dramas with them in addition to the music for Church services which he provided.

In 1875 his first composition was published in the LDS Church Sunday school magazine, 'The Juvenile Instructor.' These would be followed by many more through his lifetime.

Evan took a job with the railroad to allow more time for music. It is said he took a small cabinet organ with him on the railroad, teaching and organizing his co-workers. Their traveling boxcar music concerts led to his notice in the northern Utah community of Logan, the railroad headquarters, where he eventually became a full-time musician, employed as the Logan Tabernacle organist and teaching

singing classes. His work with his musical dramas and other presentations was continued in Logan and he achieved notable success.

In 1882 Evan moved to Salt Lake City to study organ with Joseph J. Daynes, the first Tabernacle organist. He also began teaching. His Sunday School Juvenile Chorus became a success and the proceeds of their quarterly concerts was his income as agreed with the Sunday School Union officers.

By the end of the year, Evan Stephens was also singing in the Tabernacle Choir and was teaching multiple singing groups. He wrote a music reading primer which was published in 1883.

In 1884 he was offered a position at the University of Deseret, the predecessor of the University of Utah, to teach vocal music. He was said to have had an excellent baritone voice as well as a very good falsetto.

In 1895 he took a leave of absence and went to Boston to study at the New England Conservatory for a year. Although receiving offers to remain, he returned to his work in Utah. He is reported to have said, "Music should be a consistent and faithful servant to the Church and neither its master nor its slave, but always consistently harmonious with its aims, sentiments, and spiritual emotions and feelings."

Evan Stephens participated on the committee responsible for the 1889 LDS Psalmody, the first LDS Hymnal to include music, and was involved in many musical publications and teaching endeavors with choral groups. In 1890 he was called to succeed Ebenezer Beesley as the director of the Tabernacle Choir.

It is noted that Evan Stephen's goal to build up the size and quality of the choir was aided by his many former students, and he was reported to be a strong disciplinarian who was vigorous and rather autocratic in having things his way. A year later the choir had 375 voices

and the Tabernacle was being remodeled to accommodate them.

A suggestion was made and accepted by the Church leaders that the Tabernacle Choir should enter the Eisteddfod (Welsh Music Festival) competition to be held at the Chicago World Fair in 1893. This was also the year that the Salt Lake Temple would be dedicated. The preparation tasks were daunting and after the choir sang at the Temple dedication, the World Fair trip was almost cancelled due to the hardships and financial burden. However, with much faith, the Church leaders gave the instruction to proceed. President Wilford Woodruff and the First Presidency of the LDS Church accompanied 250 choir members on the rail journey as the choir performed their first concert tour. This was done as part of the trip to the World's Fair in Chicago to pay the costs of the trip. They performed in Denver Colorado, Independence and St. Louis Missouri, and Omaha Nebraska as well as Chicago. Their performance at the World's Fair brought acclaim to the choir and its conductor, and earned them the second place prize. It is reported that while at the World's Fair, President Woodruff said in praise of Evan Stephens, "A shepherd boy came down from the mountains and is here today to contest in this great competition." After returning home, they presented a benefit concert to finish paying for the trip.

After the excitement of the tour, everyday life resumed and within a few years, Evan felt the Tabernacle Choir's abilities had decayed and he became so frustrated with the lack of attendance at rehearsals and the ability to do only the simpler repertoire that he threatened to quit in 1901. President Joseph F. Smith, LDS Church President at the time, noted the good will that the choir was bringing to the church and announced a decision to treat membership in the choir as a mission and a sole church duty. This relieved the conflict many had experienced with fulfilling their local church callings. This decision apparently did not last and was resisted by local church leaders, as similar

issues arose in later years and Evan offered his resignation several times after this.

In spite of challenges, the Tabernacle Choir continued successfully and Evan Stephens arranged seven additional concert tours for the choir, which began a tradition still followed today.

Although he traveled quite often and visited Wales and Europe several times, he was noted as a champion of home grown music and the training of the youth of the church. It is said that his greatest reward was the accomplishment of the work, he wanted no other recognition, although much came to him, including an honorary Bachelor of Music Degree.

In 1916, at the age of 62, Evan Stephens was released as Director of the Tabernacle Choir. He had served for twenty-six years and it is reported that three honorary retirement concerts were given. He continued in other musical endeavors, writing cantatas, anthems and hymn tunes, and serving on the LDS Church Music Committee. Nineteen of his hymns and hymn tunes are found in the current 1985 LDS Hymnal.

Evan Stephens never married, although it is said that he was engaged as a young man and was much affected by the death of his fiancée. In 1903 he hired his grand-niece, Sarah Daniels, recently immigrated from Wales, to keep house for him, which she did for almost thirty years. He was noted to love nature and the home he built in Salt Lake City was on a large property which he planted with native Welsh flowers.

In October of 1930, three weeks after his last public appearance as a guest conductor of the Tabernacle Choir at the October General Conference of the Church, Evan Stephens passed away at the age of 76. The Tabernacle Choir sang a number of his hymns at his funeral services and speakers included LDS Church Apostles, and other leaders, who paid tribute to him and the service he had rendered through his remarkable life. Through unceasing effort and the

blessings of Providence he raised himself from a poverty stricken shepherd boy who did not own a pair of shoes, to national acclaim and great success.



*Information in this article came from:*

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