

Did You Think to Pray?

February 2012 - Hymn of the Month



The text of this classic hymn was written by Mary A. Pepper Kidder about 1875 and set to music by William O. Perkins. It was published in a collection of Christian songs in 1876 and is believed to be currently included in 108 different hymnals.

The questions asked in the hymn, and the human needs identified, are just as pertinent today as they were when the text was written over 130 years ago. They point us to the need for, and the power of prayer. It is interesting that the author used the term, "Balm of Gilead," in the last verse rather than another phrase to describe healing. Why did she recommend that those with sorrow and trials borrow it every morning? Literally, Balm of Gilead is a medicine and wound dressing widely used and traded in biblical times. It comes from an oleo-gum-resin exuded by a small aromatic tree or shrub believed by some to have been brought from Arabia to Judea by the Queen of Sheba as a gift to King Solomon. It was cultivated particularly on the highland region of Gilead, sometimes referred to as Mt. Gilead, which is east of the river Jordan and south of the Sea of Galilee. Symbolically, the term "Balm of Gilead" has, in common use, come to represent anything that soothes or heals. The fact that Gilead is located in the region where the Savior lived and taught provides a deeper symbolism. Also, He is the physician referred to in Jeremiah 8:22, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?" This leads to the conclusion that "Balm of Gilead" as referred to in the hymn is a metaphor for the Savior's healing power that is available to us through prayer.

Mary Ann Pepper Kidder was born in 1820 in Boston, Massachusetts. She was blinded as a teenager, but fortunately for us, regained her sight after a few years. She was a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and wrote many hymns, only one or two of which are in common use today. Her best known work is "Did You Think to Pray?" She lived in New York City for many years and died in Chelsea, Massachusetts in 1905.

William Oscar Perkins was born in Stockbridge, Vermont in 1831; the oldest sibling in a musical family. One brother was also a composer; another was a well-known opera singer. William studied music in Boston, Massachusetts; then pursued conservatory studies in London, England and Milan, Italy. He returned to Boston, founded a music academy and during the course of his life published many hymnals, glee books and other collections. Perhaps his best known hymn tune is for "Did You Think to Pray?" William died in Boston in 1902.

Some publications of this hymn include the following four verses.

Ere you left your room this morning.
Did you think to pray?
In the name of Christ, our Savior,
Did you sue for loving favor
As a shield today?

Refrain

Oh, how praying rests the weary!
Prayer will change the night to day.
So, when life gets dark and dreary,
Don't forget to pray.

When you met with great temptation,
Did you think to pray?
By His dying love and merit,
Did you claim the Holy Spirit

As your guide and stay?

Refrain

Oh, how praying rests the weary!
Prayer will change the night to day.
So, when life gets dark and dreary,
Don't forget to pray.

When your heart was filled with anger,
Did you think to pray?
Did you plead for grace, my brother,
That you might forgive another
Who had crossed your way?

Refrain

Oh, how praying rests the weary!
Prayer will change the night to day.
So, when life gets dark and dreary,
Don't forget to pray.

When sore trials came upon you,
Did you think to pray?
When your soul was full of sorrow,
Balm of Gilead did you borrow
At the gates of day?

Refrain

Oh, how praying rests the weary!
Prayer will change the night to day.
So, when life gets dark and dreary,
Don't forget to pray.



Information in this article came from:

http://www.hymntime.com/tch/bio/k/i/d/kidder_mgp.htm

http://www.hymntime.com/tch/bio/pl/e/r/perkins_two.htm

<http://drhamrick.blogspot.com/2011/02/beyond-sunsets-radiant-glow.html>

<http://earthnotes.tripod.com/balmgilead.htm>

Holy Bible, King James Version, published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints