

More Holiness Give Me

March 2013 - Hymn of the Month

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More Holiness Give Me



If we were to find a four leaf clover, what would we wish for?

As Christians look forward to the celebration of Easter at the end of March this year, it is fitting that we reflect on the state of our discipleship, and the true desires of our hearts.

The text of *More Holiness Give Me* has an apt description of the attributes of a disciple of Jesus Christ. By removing the words, "more" and "give me", the list is clearer: holiness, strivings within, patience in suffering, sorrow for sin, faith in the Savior, etc.

The text and the music for *More Holiness Give Me* are the work of one man, Philip Paul Bliss, who spent some time as a singing evangelist and minister. It is evident in the text that he felt his human shortcomings greatly. The basic structure of the piece is the repeated prayerful entreaty for "more" of the essential Christian attributes he describes.

At first glance the lines may seem to be an unrelated list tied together by rhyme, however, note in the first verse that there is a connection between having faith in the Savior and a sense of his care, to having patience in suffering, feeling sorrow for sin, having a desire to strive within, praying with purpose and finding joy in service.

The lines of the second verse speak of what the Savior has done for us, and refer to his teachings (hope in his word), example (meekness in trial), crucifixion (sorrows, grief), atonement (praise for relief), and resurrection (glory), for which we are grateful.

Author & Composer



Philip Paul Bliss was born to Isaac and Lydia Doolittle Bliss in July of 1838, the third child and the first and only surviving son. His parents lived in a log cabin on a homestead in a rural Appalachian mountain region of northern Pennsylvania. There is some debate about the actual place of birth, but it is believed to have been in Clearfield County, approximately 100 miles northeast of Pittsburgh.

Philip's father's family is believed to have been of Welsh descent. His father was a devout Christian and a musical man

who was always singing gospel songs. Young Philip learned to sing with his father and to whistle and play on reeds or other rude instruments he would make himself. He showed a love of music early in life. The family was poor and during his childhood they moved several times in the sparsely settled region. Thus his opportunities for formal schooling were limited, and his early education was mostly what his family could provide.

At the age of eleven, it is said that Philip left home to work on a farm, carrying all of his clothing done up in a handkerchief. For the next five years he worked on farms and in lumber camps, meanwhile taking every opportunity for schooling that presented itself.

After a Baptist minister conducted a revival at a school he attended, he was baptized at the age of twelve by a minister of the nearby Christian Church. He is reported to have said, however, that he never could remember the time when he did not love the Savior.

At the age of seventeen Philip attended, for the winter, a select school at East Troy, Bradford County, Pennsylvania, completing his teaching credentials, and the next winter, 1856, taught school in Allegheny County, NY. The following year his life took a musical turn as he spent the winter in Towanda, Pennsylvania and became acquainted with Mr. Towner. This led to receiving his first systematic instruction in music at Mr. Towner's singing school, and through this association attending his first music convention at Rome, about nine miles northeast of Towanda, where he met composer William B. Bradbury, who is believed to have been an early influence. Philip was said to have had a wonderful bass voice which was instrumental to his success as a musician.

In the winter of 1859 Philip taught at the Rome Academy. Rome, Pennsylvania, is about sixty miles northwest of Scranton. He boarded at the home of a member of the school board, Mr. O. F. Young, whose acquaintance he had made the previous year by means of his singing, and who invited him to make his home there. The Young family was musical and all of the children were among his pupils. Philip was able to have his younger sister come and stay there also to attend school, and through her friendship with Lucy, the eldest daughter of the house, Philip became acquainted with his future wife.

Philip P. Bliss and Lucy J. Young were married in June of 1859 in the parlor of the minister's house at Wysocks, a little town about six miles south of Rome on the Susquehanna River. This event Philip noted in his diary as "the very best thing I could have done." Lucy was about eighteen years of age at that time and he was twenty. Neither of them had money, so they continued to live with Lucy's parents, and Philip worked on the farm for his father-in-law for the

Hymn Text



More holiness give me,
More strivings within,
More patience in suffering,
More sorrow for sin,
More faith in my Savior,
More sense of his care,
More joy in his service,
More purpose in prayer.

More gratitude give me,
More trust in the Lord,
More pride in his glory,
More hope in his word,
More tears for his sorrows,
More pain at his grief,
More meekness in trial,
More praise for relief.

More purity give me,
More strength to overcome,
More freedom from earthstains,
More longing for home.
More fit for the kingdom,
More used would I be,
More blessed and holy –
More, Savior, like thee.



The third verse effectively describes the requirements for being like the Savior and coming home to his kingdom: serving, overcoming the stains of earth life, and becoming pure and holy. As the apostle Paul stated in the Bible New Testament, holiness is required of those who would see the Lord.

Philip Bliss wrote a tune that he named MY PRAYER for *More Holiness Give Me*, and in some early publications the hymn had the title, *My Prayer*. The completed work is believed to have been first published in 1873, included in *Sunshine for Sunday Schools*, which was edited by P.P. Bliss and published by John Church/George F. Root & Sons.

More Holiness Give Me is said to have been published in over 100 other hymnals since then, although some have a few variations in the text.

It appeared in the 1909 publication of *Deseret Sunday School Songs*, and in the 1948 and subsequent editions of *Hymns, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (LDS hymnal).

In the 1985 edition of the LDS hymnal, the time signature was changed from 12/8 to 4/4 and the key was changed from E flat to D, to make the hymn easier to play, sing and direct.

typical wage of thirteen dollars a month. That winter he also taught music lessons in the evenings, and had a great desire to learn more about music.

In the summer of 1860 a "Normal Academy of Music" was held at Geneseo, New York, about 125 miles northwest of Rome, offering instruction from some of the notable musicians of the area. In this instance it is understood that the word "normal" meant that the academy was for training teachers. Philip despaired of being able to attend, lacking the thirty dollar fee, and was disheartened at his future prospects. However, Lucy's Grandmother Allen, who lived there with the family, hearing his distress and listening to his plight, kindly gave him the silver coins she had been saving for years in an old stocking, which amounted to more than the fee.

This was a pivotal moment, and we are all much indebted to Grandmother Allen for her generosity. Philip attended the "Normal" and was said to have spent six weeks of the hardest study of his life there. Bolstered with this training he became a professional music teacher the following winter. It is said that his father-in-law gave him a twenty dollar melodeon, and with the small, foot pedal powered reed organ, and a horse named Fanny, he traveled about the area giving lessons.

For the next few years he worked on the farm and attended the "Normal Academy" in the summers and taught music in the winter. He was quite successful and saved enough money from his singing schools to purchase a small cottage in Rome, to which he also moved his parents from their humble home in the backwoods. Unfortunately, his father was only able to enjoy his improved circumstances for a short time, and passed away in 1864, when Philip was about twenty-six.

In the summer of 1865 Philip Bliss and Mr. Townner conducted a concert tour as "The Yankee Boys." Philip was then drafted into the Union Army; however, he was discharged two weeks later, the Civil War drawing to an end.

Around this same time Philip sent a letter to the publisher Root & Cady along with the manuscript of a song, and asked if they would give him a flute for it. It is stated that George Root found the letter with its beautiful handwriting and original style as interesting as the music. They accepted the music and sent him the flute, along with some revisions for his first song which was published in 1865. They were on the lookout for bright men, and felt they had found one.

The association between Philip Bliss and George Root developed through correspondence and in November of 1865, "The Yankee Boys" came to Chicago, Illinois to work for Root & Cady, giving concerts. They did not consider themselves to be successful at this and tendered their resignation in December; however, Philip was requested to stay on.

This he did, and spent the next few years holding musical conventions, giving concerts and private music instruction. Philip and Lucy were said to be completely devoted to each other and she was also employed by Root & Cady, working first as a clerk, and then supporting her husband and serving as an accompanist. During this time Philip was also writing and sending in compositions. During the next few years many of these were published in books by Root & Cady. Every summer Philip and Lucy returned to Rome, Pennsylvania, and it is said that many of his sweetest pieces were written there in the rest and peace of the hills.

George Root described Philip Bliss as a man with a splendid physique, a handsome face and a striking dignified presence. He said it was delightfully incongruous that a man of such great size and masculine appearance should have such gentleness of manner, perfect amiability and conspicuous lack of self-assertion, such sensitiveness, considerateness and deference to all. He also had wonderful natural mental gifts. It is said Philip considered all these things as being favored of Heaven and his first impulse on every good thing that happened was to fall on his knees and thank God.

Philip's travels and associations increased, and he visited Boston, New York and Brooklyn. In the summer of 1869 in Chicago, he and Lucy happened upon a gospel meeting of Mr. Dwight L. Moody, a renowned evangelist of the day. Their decision to attend the meeting changed the course of their life. Mr. Moody was without his leader for the singing that night and Philip helped as he could from the audience, which

drew Mr. Moody's attention. In shaking hands on the way out, Mr. Moody got him to promise to come and help in the singing as often as he could. This he did, and the association led to other opportunities.

Through connections of Mr. Moody, in July of 1870 Philip became the choir leader and Superintendent of the Sabbath School for the First Congregational Church of Chicago in addition to his other work. The pastor, Dr. Goodwin, is reported to have said that Mr. Bliss was a gifted, sympathizing, efficient helper, who shared his feeling that to make the song and service of God's house showy and entertaining was an abomination in God's sight; that all music in connection with worship should be consecrated and worshipful.

Philip continued in association with Mr. Moody and in the winter of 1874, received letters from Scotland where Mr. Moody was ministering, urging him to give up his business and sing the gospel. Philip and Lucy wanted to be sure that this was the Lord's will, and received assurance from the urging of their friend Horatio G. Spafford, the author of *It is Well with my Soul*, and decided to give it a trial run. The trial run in Waukegan was successful and filled with indications of the Holy Spirit, so on March 25, 1874, he gave up income and career to take up this self-denying calling, which he is said to have considered as a joy in being a servant of Jesus Christ.

For the next two years he traveled extensively, it is said he visited Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, Kentucky and Missouri, singing and influencing people to come to Christ. He had a desire to work for the children and young people and conducted meetings for them.

In December of 1876, Philip and Lucy spent a very happy Christmas with their two sons, ages four and one, and their extended family at Rome, and then, leaving their sons with the grandparents and aunt, were required to leave for Chicago as they had engagements there. They traveled by rail and shortly before eight o'clock on the cold stormy evening of December 29, 1876, the connecting train in which they traveled from Buffalo, New York around Lake Erie, approaching Ashtabula, Ohio, plunged into a ravine as the bridge gave way. Some of the 160 passengers escaped from the seven cars through broken windows into the icy water and snow, but it is said that within five minutes, the stoves and lamps in the varnished wooden cars had set them ablaze, and the remainder of the passengers perished in the intense heat of the ensuing fire. A survivor reported that Philip had escaped through a window, but went back to find Lucy and did not return. They both died in the flames and no trace of their remains was found.

Philip P. Bliss was only thirty-eight years old at the time of his death, yet it is said that he authored hundreds of hymn texts and composed many of their tunes. He was a remarkable combination of poet, composer, singer and preacher. The story of his life shows that he was not only a great example of a man who, through divine providence, raised himself from poverty to national acclaim, but a great example of the Christian attributes he expressed in *More Holiness Give Me*.



Information in this article came from:

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