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# The Nourishing Power of Hymns

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*Hymns play an essential role in spirituality, revelation, and conversion.*



**T**his magnificent choir gives inspiring sermons. In fact, “some of the greatest sermons are preached by the singing of hymns.”<sup>1</sup> My testimony and conversion to the restored gospel were strongly influenced by singing the hymns of Zion as a young boy. I grew up in the small town of Mapleton, Utah, and attended meetings in what is known today as the “old white church.” My 95-year-old mother still lives in Mapleton. When I visit her, I drive past the “old white church,” and a flood of sweet memories fills my mind. Among them is the converting power of the hymns we sang in priesthood, Sunday School, and sacrament

meetings. My experiences were similar to that of President Hinckley when, as a deacon, he attended a stake priesthood meeting with his father. They sang “Praise to the Man.”<sup>2</sup> Later he would say, “I had an impression that has never left that Joseph Smith was indeed a prophet of God.”<sup>3</sup> I believe that many of our Saints experience this again and again. Hymns play an essential role in spirituality, revelation, and conversion.

## **Hymns Invite the Spirit**

Hymns are “an essential part of our church meetings. [They] invite the Spirit of the Lord.”<sup>4</sup> They often do this quicker than anything else we may do. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. said, “We get nearer to the Lord through music than perhaps through any other thing except prayer.”<sup>5</sup>

Two missionaries teaching an older couple in their home in Peru were interrupted by the arrival of the couple’s son, his wife, and three children. The elders explained who they were and what they were doing. The son was suspicious of the missionaries, resulting in an awkward moment. The junior companion prayed silently, “Heavenly Father, what do we do?” The impression came to sing. They sang “I Am a Child of God.”<sup>6</sup> The Spirit touched the hearts of this family of



five. Instead of two converts, all seven became members, influenced initially by a hymn.

Music in Church meetings and classes should facilitate a spirit of worship, revelation, and testimony. For sacrament meetings, the bishopric or branch presidency is responsible to select or approve music. They ensure that the music, the words, and the musical instruments are sacred, dignified, and will promote worship and revelation. Music becomes a performance when it brings attention to itself. Years ago, I was responsible for the music in a meeting where a special musical number was a performance. It was a disappointment. The spirit of worship was diminished.

#### **Hymns Invite Revelation**

Hymns “create a feeling of reverence.”<sup>7</sup> The words *reverence* and *revelation* are like twins who like each other’s company. When the Seventy and Presiding Bishopric are invited to meetings with the First Presidency and the Twelve, we are reminded

to arrive early and reverently listen to prelude music. Doing so invites revelation and prepares us for the meeting.

President Packer taught that a member who softly plays “prelude music from the hymnbook tempers our feelings and causes us to go over in our minds the lyrics which teach the peaceable things of the kingdom. If we will listen, they are teaching the gospel, for the hymns of the Restoration are, in fact, a course in doctrine!”<sup>8</sup>

#### **Hymns Invite Conversion**

The hymns of the Restoration carry with them the spirit of conversion. They came as a result of sacrifice. Hymns like “Praise to the Man,”<sup>9</sup> “Come, Come, Ye Saints,”<sup>10</sup> “Ye Elders of Israel,”<sup>11</sup> “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,”<sup>12</sup> “Redeemer of Israel,”<sup>13</sup> and many others reinforce the great truths of the Restoration—such as the divinity of the Father and the Son, the plan of redemption, revelation, latter-day scriptures, the

gathering of Israel, the holy priesthood, and ordinances and covenants. These nourishing hymns create an atmosphere that invites the Spirit, which leads us to conversion.

How incomplete and empty sacrament meetings would be without hymns of worship.<sup>14</sup> Sacred among all hymns are those that capture the sacrifice and the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ and His infinite Atonement.

My earliest memories of the healing power of the Savior are associated with sacrament hymns. This sentence is real to me: “I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me, confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me.”<sup>15</sup>

My understanding of the doctrines of the Atonement is connected to the hymns. This verse is illustrative:

*How great, how glorious, how complete,  
Redemption’s grand design,  
Where justice, love, and mercy meet  
In harmony divine!*<sup>16</sup>



### Teaching Children Hymns Begins at Home

Singing hymns and listening to appropriate music begin at home. The First Presidency has reminded us:

“Latter-day Saints should fill their homes with the sound of worthy music.

“... We hope the hymnbook will take a prominent place among the scriptures and other religious books in our homes. The hymns can bring families a spirit of beauty and peace and can inspire love and unity among family members.

“Teach your children to love the hymns. Sing them on the Sabbath, in [family] home evening, during scripture study, at prayer time. Sing as you work, as you play, and as you travel together. Sing hymns as lullabies to build faith and testimony in your young ones.”<sup>17</sup>

### Worship More Meaningfully through Hymns

Important lessons I have learned and seek to apply about hymns are:

1. Strive to be more punctual to meetings, sit quietly and listen to the prelude music, and experience reverence and revelation.
2. Exit meetings more reverently, allowing the postlude music to extend the spirit of the meeting.
3. Sing the hymns. I see some who have access to hymnals but do not sing.
4. Choose hymns appropriate to the meeting and messages.
5. Use hymns to introduce or to emphasize scriptures and gospel truths in lessons and classes.
6. Listen to the hymns more frequently in our homes, inviting the Spirit to prevail.

I pray that we may eliminate any inappropriate music from our lives and follow the counsel of the First Presidency: “Brothers and sisters, let us use the hymns to invite the Spirit of the Lord into our congregations, our homes, and our personal lives.

Let us memorize and ponder them, recite and sing them, and partake of their spiritual nourishment. Know that the song of the righteous is a prayer unto our Father in Heaven, ‘and it shall be answered with a blessing upon [your] heads.’”<sup>18</sup> Of these truths I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

### NOTES

1. *Hymns*, ix.
2. *Hymns*, no. 27.
3. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 399.
4. *Hymns*, ix.
5. In Conference Report, Oct. 1936, 111.
6. *Hymns*, no. 301.
7. *Hymns*, ix.
8. “Reverence Invites Revelation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 22.
9. *Hymns*, no. 27.
10. *Hymns*, no. 30.
11. *Hymns*, no. 319.
12. *Hymns*, no. 19.
13. *Hymns*, no. 6.
14. Just as hymns are essential to Sabbath and family worship, so are hymns and carols to Christmas (see *Hymns*, nos. 201–14).
15. “I Stand All Amazed,” *Hymns*, no. 193.
16. “How Great the Wisdom and the Love,” *Hymns*, no. 195.
17. *Hymns*, x.
18. *Hymns*, x.