



Hymn Study Training

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

I. The Hymn

A. The text

Why it matters: Because we're going to *sing* these words to God. We shouldn't even be able to worship God in the first place, so should we not take care to worship God well?

1. They must come from the heart (we must know what they mean & then mean it)
2. They must be honoring to God (not heretical... sometimes hymn texts will be wrong & should be modified!)

Study: Read the text several times, mark it up, know it forwards and backwards.

1. Hymns are POETRY: Look for repetition (words, phrases, ideas, themes) and images
2. Hymns are WRITTEN/SAID: What is the heart behind writing things this specific way?
3. Hymns are SCRIPTURAL: Identify any Scriptural allusions or Scriptural ideas

Synthesize: After understanding the main point of the hymn, try to pick **ONE** angle/aspect, **ONE** focus. Do not talk about everything.

- Use this one focus to decide which details about the hymn to include, which Scripture passages to examine, and which questions to ask.
- NOTE: The main point of a hymn can be quite simple. Don't be fooled into assuming that simple means insignificant or not-worth-studying. What does it *mean* very specifically? How does this play out in our beliefs, our desires, our thoughts, our actions, our interactions?

B. The history

Although this is optional, it is often helpful to attach a hymn to a time, place, and person.

1. Backstory of the hymn

"Jesus Loves Even Me" was written by Philip Bliss, the person who wrote "Man of Sorrows." Bliss got the idea to write this hymn while singing "Oh, How I Love Jesus" over and over at a camp meeting. While doing this he thought, "Have I not been singing enough about my POOR love for Jesus, and shall I not rather sing of His GREAT love for me?" So he went home and wrote this hymn.

2. How the hymn has impacted people

II. The Scripture (1-2 passages)

A. Preparation for Explanation

You should be able to answer these 3 questions:

1. What does the passage say (in context)?
2. Why does this passage have anything to do with us?
3. In light of the above, what are the implications of the passage for us?

B. Explanation in the Hymn Study

2 Pitfalls:

1. Scripture not studied. We are not here to study man's words or figure out what man thinks of God.
2. Scripture is divorced from the hymn text, intentionally or not. The study will not help us sing from the heart if we don't relate the hymn to Scripture.

2 Guidelines:

1. CAREFULLY consider what the Scripture passage says
2. Clearly connect SPECIFICS of Scripture passage to SPECIFICS of the hymn text

C. Selection

- Select what best aligns with the focus
- Select what expands upon the hymn/fills in gaps in the hymn
- Select shorter rather than longer passages

III. The Study

A. Asking Questions

- Questions should be open-ended (if you have a specific detail that you want to bring out, don't ask it as a question, just say it!)
- Questions should clearly drive toward or from the focus
 - This can be in the form of an observation question
 - The goal is ultimately to consider WHY and HOW

In case questions fall flat...

- Prepare multiple rephrasings or multiple sub-questions under each question

B. Leading Discussions

- Usually you can view yourself more as a participant

C. Typical Structure

1. Introduce the studied hymn
2. Read the hymn & Pray
3. Pose a framing discussion question
4. Re-read the hymn
5. Restate the discussion question
6. Discussion
7. Study OR Supplementary discussion question(s)
8. "Any other thoughts?" & Summary
9. Sing the studied hymn
10. Introduce and sing the complementary hymn
11. Pray

Link to our article on how to study hymns and a PDF of this handout!

