

The Stories of 5 Great Hymns
What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Notes While Watching the DVD

Who was the author of *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*? Where was he from and where did he live the latter part of his life?

What two tragedies seriously affected Joseph Scriven's life?

What was the occasion for Joseph Scriven to write this poem?

To what did Joseph Scriven devote himself in life?

For Reflection

God gives some lives where tragedies are few. For others, tragedy is almost a way of life.

For the latter, how is this hymn and its story a comfort? _____

For the former, what purpose might this hymn serve? _____

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What a Friend We Have in Jesus

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

1. What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Ev'rything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Ev'rything to God in prayer!
2. Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our ev'ry weakness—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
3. Are we weak and heavy laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
You will find a solace there.

verse 1 – What two things does Friend Jesus carry for us?

In both of these situations, what should we utilize?

Some think to pray only as a last resort. What does this verse encourage? What would Jesus encourage?

verse 2 – How can Jesus be so great a help in our “trials and temptations”? Look at Hebrews 2:18.

In the second half of this verse, what are some of the great virtues of our friend Jesus?

verse 3 – In a few plain words, what difficult circumstances are described in this verse

a) (lines 1-2)

b) (line 5)

Summary

The lyrics of this hymn have a tendency to wander, presenting almost a laundry list of issues. On the other hand, there is a constant invitation to prayer. How do those two features work together?

Point 1: Pray Often – What happens in prayer? What do we need alongside prayer?

Point 2: We Have a Friend in Jesus – Having looked at all three verses, in what way is Jesus a friend? How is he different from other friends?

When you face difficulties, how do you tend to view God?

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adversary | <input type="checkbox"/> Judge | <input type="checkbox"/> Friend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Out to Lunch | <input type="checkbox"/> Refuge | <input type="checkbox"/> Enemy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irrelevant | <input type="checkbox"/> Reluctant Helper | |

What could help you to view God more fully as a friend?

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What a Friend We Have in Jesus

You can answer the questions on this page by watching the video

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What two tragedies seriously affected Joseph Scriven's life?

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To what did Joseph Scriven devote himself in life?

the purpose of these good deeds was "to reflect the love of God in his life."

For Reflection

God gives some of us lives where tragedies are few. For others, tragedy is almost a way of life.

Especially for the latter, can the story behind this hymn be of any comfort?

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Each verse talks about a different difficulty of life, and then how our great Friend Jesus is

verse 1 – What two things does Friend Jesus carry for us?

Sins and griefs. These are felt in troubled conscience and sorrow.

In these situations, what should we utilize? What are the results of not praying?

Prayer. Like a child not asking Dad or Mom for help, we make extra work & trouble for ourselves when we do not pray. Jms 4:2-3

Agree/Disagree — If God were really loving, he would bear “our sins and griefs” without us asking.

A parent may want to help his child, but does not help until asked. The parent wants the child to realize the need, and show the trust. Otherwise you have an unhealthy child.

verse 2 – In our “trials and temptations” how can Jesus be so great a friend? Look at Hebrews 2:18.

We feel people understand if they experienced the same. Ps 41:9

In the second half of this verse, what are some of the great virtues in our friend Jesus?

He is completely dedicated to us. More than any person, he sympathizes, understands and knows us.

verse 3 – In a few plain words, what are the difficult circumstances described in this verse

a) (lines 1-2) **anxiety**

b) (line 5) **loneliness**

These are the great burdens common to so many people!

Having looked at all three verses, in what way is Jesus a friend?

He understands so many troubles. He wants to listen AND answer
In what way is he different from what we might usually think of as a friend? **This is good to understand.**

Positive – He is closer, more loving, understanding, consistent than any human friend can be.

Negative -- We look at friends as equals. Jesus is not an equal. He reserves the right to tell us what to do, to reprimand, to commend in his wisdom. Friend, yes. But even more.

When you face difficulties, how do you tend to view God?

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
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What could help you to view God more fully as a friend?

First thing: Remember what he has done for us, and even called us “friends” John 15:13-15.

Second: Do what this hymn says: Pray! Hebrews 4:16.

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What a Friend We Have in Jesus

EXTRA INFO

https://hymnary.org/text/what_a_friend_we_have_in_jesus_all_our_s

Joseph M. Scriven (b. Seapatrick, County Down, Ireland, 1819; d. Bewdley, Rice Lake, ON, Canada, 1886), an Irish immigrant to Canada, wrote this text near Port Hope, Ontario, in 1855. Because his life was filled with grief and trials, Scriven often needed the solace of the Lord as described in his famous hymn. Educated at Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, he enrolled in a military college to prepare for an army career. However, poor health forced him to give up that ambition. Soon after came a second blow—his fiancée died in a drowning accident on the eve of their wedding in 1844. Later that year he moved to Ontario, where he taught school in Woodstock and Brantford. His plans for marriage were dashed again when his new bride-to-be died after a short illness in 1855. Following this calamity Scriven seldom had a regular income, and he was forced to live in the homes of others. He also experienced mistrust from neighbors who did not appreciate his eccentricities or his work with the underprivileged. A member of the Plymouth Brethren, he tried to live according to the Sermon on the Mount as literally as possible, giving and sharing all he had and often doing menial tasks for the poor and physically disabled. Because Scriven suffered from depression, no one knew if his death by drowning in Rice Lake was suicide or an accident.

Scriven wrote "What a Friend" to comfort his sick mother in Dublin, possibly right after the death of his second fiancée. When asked by a neighbor about his writing of the text, Scriven modestly commented, "The Lord and I did it between us." The text was published anonymously in Horace Hastings's *Social Hymns, Original and Selected* (1865), but Scriven was given proper credit in Hastings's *Songs of Pilgrimage* (1886). Ira D. Sankey ([PHH 73](#)) included the text, set to the familiar tune by Charles C. Converse, in his various hymnals (from 1875 on).

Scriven's text clearly arises from his own experiences in life. Although not great poetry, the text has spiritual appeal and an effective repeated phrase, "take it to the Lord in prayer." Because of its simple encouragement to "pray without ceasing," the text is much loved in many circles of Christendom. A collection of his poetry was published in *Hymns and Other Verses* (1869).

Of somewhat dubious origin from the same site: hymnary.org/person/Scriven_JM

Scriven, Joseph. Mr. Sankey, in his *My Life and Sacred Songs*, 1906, p. 279, says that Scriven was b. in Dublin in 1820, was a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, and went to Canada when he was 25, and died there at Port Hope, on Lake Ontario, in 1886. His hymn:—

What a Friend we have in Jesus. [*Jesus our Friend*] was, according to Mr. Sankey, discovered to be his in the following manner: "A neighbour, sitting up with him in his illness, happened upon a manuscript of 'What a Friend we have in Jesus.' Reading it with great delight, and questioning Mr. Scriven about it, he said he had composed it for his mother, to comfort her in a time of special sorrow, not intending any one else should see it." We find the hymn in H. 1... Hastings's *Social Hymns, Original and Selected*, 1865, No. 242; and his *Song of Pilgrimage*, 1886, No. 1291, where it is attributed to "Joseph Scriven, cir. 1855." It is found in many modern collections.

The Wikipedia page has other slightly different details and chronology for Scriven's life and the writing and publishing of this hymn.