

Real Life Stories

Biography of Hymn Writer - Phillip Bliss

Phillip Paul Bliss was born into a log cabin home in the mountains of Pennsylvania in July 1838. His father, Isaac, was a faithful Christian man. Family prayers and worship were regular activities in his home.

He had little schooling apart from his father's singing and music training, and his mother's teaching. The Bible was always in the home, and he learned the truths about God at an early age.



*God is always near me, Hearing what I say,
Knowing all my thoughts and deeds, All my work and play.*

At the age of ten he heard the piano being played for the first time. He was selling vegetables door to door and was so taken with the music that he entered the house and stood at the door of the living room listening to the beautiful music unknown to the pianist, who was shocked when she turned around and found him there.

At the age of twelve he trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and joined a local Baptist church. He often spoke of the night that he got saved.

*'Tis the promise of God, full salvation to give
Unto him who on Jesus, His Son, will believe.*

*Hallelujah, 'tis done! I believe on the Son;
I am saved by the blood of the crucified One.*

By the age of eighteen Phillip had completed his training to be a school teacher and commenced in this field, also working on local farms in the summer months. A vocal coach heard him sing and knew he had a gifted talent. He gave him singing lessons and helped him to train his voice.

As a teenager he realized that he had a gift for composing music. He sent his first song to George F. Root (who wrote "Come to the Saviour, Make No Delay"), attaching a letter that read, "If you think this song is worth anything, I would appreciate having a flute in exchange for it." He received the flute!

After marrying Lucy Young he travelled around, working as a music teacher before deciding to turn his attention to full-time composing.

In 1864, at the age of twenty-six, he was drafted into the army for a short time. This was during the American Civil War. At one time in battle it seemed that the enemy was going to overcome the army. The colonel of the army waved a flag from a distance and passed the word to the men at the battle. His message was "Hold the fort! I am coming!"

*Ho! my comrades, see the signal, waving in the sky!
Reinforcements now appearing, victory is nigh!*

*"Hold the fort, for I am coming", Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to Heaven, "By Thy grace we will."*

For the next eight years Phillip and his wife travelled, taught, sang, and wrote songs that were published for use in the churches. One night D.L. Moody was conducting a mission in which the singing was really poor. He noticed Phillip and his strong voice. He invited him to give up his work and to become a full-time singing evangelist. During that work Phillip wrote some of his most popular hymns, including "I Am So Glad That Jesus Loves Me."

His three years as a Sunday school superintendent also produced songs such as "Dare to Be a Daniel."

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He was urged to surrender the rest of his life to the work of God, and he laid out a fleece before the Lord. Should his music make a difference in someone's life, he would give the rest of his days to reaching the lost with the gospel.

During the last weekend of March 1874 he was singing at several meetings. At one of these meetings he sang one of his songs, "Almost Persuaded". As he sang, sinners came forward, and many trusted Christ that night. The following afternoon at a prayer meeting he surrendered the rest of his life to the Lord.

On Friday, 24 November 1876, Phillip sang at a special meeting where over one thousand preachers were in attendance. Three years earlier his good friend had lost his wife and four children in the Atlantic Ocean when their ship sank after a collision. That friend was Horatio Spafford, and he later wrote a poem as he sailed by the scene of the accident. He passed it to Phillip Bliss and asked him to compose music for the words. At that meeting of over one thousand preachers, the hymn was sung for the first time.

*When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

A few weeks after that meeting he visited a prison and held a service for the eight hundred prisoners. As he spoke of the love of God and sang, many of the men wept, and some came to the Lord. The song that moved the hardened men that day was, "Man of Sorrows".

*Man of Sorrows, what a name, For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim! Hallelujah! what a Saviour!*

Just after Christmas of that year Phillip and his wife were travelling on a train to Chicago to meet D.L. Moody to work together on a gospel campaign. The train derailed on 29 December during a violent snowstorm. As a result, a fire broke out on the train. Phillip managed to get out of the train but went back to find his wife and try to rescue her as she was trapped under the ironwork of the seats. No trace of their bodies was ever found. Only 14 of the 160 passengers survived.

Phillip's trunk survived and was sent on to Chicago. There some notes were discovered of verses that he had written before that journey. One read, "*I know not what awaits me, God kindly veils my eyes . . .*"

Phillip died at the age of thirty-seven. In the trunk were also found the words of a hymn that he had not yet composed the music for. A friend of his wrote the music for this hymn, and it has been loved by many over the years.

*I will sing of my Redeemer, And His wondrous love to me;
On the cruel cross He suffered, From the curse to set me free.*

*Sing, O sing of my Redeemer! With His blood He purchased me;
On the cross He sealed my pardon, Paid the debt, and made me free.*

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