

CFBC Hymns Class 40

Stuart Hine (1899-1989)

and Karl Gustav Boberg (1859-1940)

“How Great Thou Art”

*Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised,
And His greatness is unsearchable.*

Psalm 145:3

*Sing to the Lord, all the earth;
Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day.
Tell of His glory among the nations,
His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
He also is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
But the Lord made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before Him,
Strength and joy are in His place.
Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name...*

1 Chronicles 16:23ff

A Brief History of Stuart Hine...

Stuart Keene Hine was born in west London on the 25th July 1899, just as a turbulent new century was dawning. He made his own personal commitment to Christ at the age of 14 and shortly after, he was baptised.

At the age of eighteen, Stuart was called up for military service in France. These were terrifying days, but Stuart's faith remained strong. Returning to London, in December 1919, Stuart eventually found employment as a clerk with the Japanese multinational Mitsubishi.



On 20th June 1923, at Manor Park Baptist Church, Stuart married Mercy Salmon and within a month of their wedding they set out for Poland to begin a period of service in Eastern Europe which was to last for over sixteen years.

In June 1934 Stuart set off on a three hundred mile mission-by-bicycle to the people of the nearby Carpathian Mountains, little imagining how momentous it would be. It was this journey that gave birth to ***How Great Thou Art!***

<https://stuarthinetrust.com/about-stuart/>

Origins of the hymn “How Great Thou Art”

The origins of this hymn may be found with Swedish pastor Carl Boberg around 1886. Boberg (1859-1940) was a leading evangelist of his day and the editor of an influential Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden periodical Sanningsvitnet (“Witness of the Truth”). Boberg served in the Swedish parliament and published several volumes of poetry, including hymns. He also helped compile the first two hymnals for the Swedish Covenant Church.

Boberg's inspiration is said to have come one day when he was caught in a thunderstorm on the southeastern coast of Sweden. The violence of the storm followed by the return of the sun and the singing of birds left him falling to his knees in awe. Soon he penned the nine stanzas of the original version in Swedish beginning with “O Store Gud, nar jag den varld beskader.” Several years later, Boberg unexpectedly heard his poem sung by a congregation to an old Swedish folk melody.

The subsequent history of the poem is somewhat unclear, but interesting. An earlier literal English translation of four of the stanzas by E. Gustav Johnson in 1925 began "O mighty God, when I behold the wonder." This version never caught on, however, though it may be found in some hymnals. The first stanza and refrain follow:

O mighty God, when I behold the wonder
Of nature's beauty, wrought by words of Thine,
And how Thou ledest all from realms up yonder,
Sustaining earthly life in love benign,

Refrain:

With rapture filled, my soul Thy name would laud,
O mighty God! O mighty God!
With rapture filled, my soul Thy name would laud,
O mighty God! O mighty God!

In 1907, Manfred von Glehn (1867-1924) translated the text from the Swedish into German. It became the hymn, "Wie gross bist du."

In 1927, a Russian version by the evangelical leader Ivan S. Prokhanoff (1896-1935) appeared in *Kimvali* (Cymbals), a collection published by the Baptist Press in Poland. English missionary Stuart K. Hine (1899-1989) and his wife heard the Russian version sung as a vocal duet in the Ukraine.

As the Hine couple crossed into Sub-Carpathian Russia, the mountain scenery brought back the memory of this song. The first three stanzas were composed while in the Carpathian Mountains. When war broke out, Hine and his wife were forced to return to England in 1939. They used the first three stanzas in evangelistic endeavors during the "Blitz years." The fourth stanza was added after the war.

Baptist hymnologist William Reynolds cites comments by George Beverly Shea (1909-2013) on the hymn's introduction in the United States through the Billy Graham Crusades: "We first sang [it] in the Toronto, Canada, Crusade of 1955. Cliff Barrows [1923-2016] and his large volunteer choir assisted in the majestic refrains. Soon after, we used it in the 'Hour of Decision' [radio broadcasts] and in American crusades. In the New York meetings of 1957 the choir joined me in singing it ninety-three times!" (Reynolds, 1976, 162).

The first two stanzas establish the grandeur of God's creation while the refrain establishes our response, "How great thou art!" In stanza three, the God of the natural created order continues the creative act by sending God's Son to redeem a lost humanity.

With this stanza, the primary theological perspective shifts from creation to atonement. While the first two stanzas express humanity's awe at the natural created order, this is not the ultimate goal of this hymn. Human sin has marred the gift of the Creator. The vivid description of nature in the first two stanzas finds its fulfillment in heaven or when we escape the earth.

The final stanza, however, may be seen as the completion of the story of creation and human redemption on an eschatological note; the fulfillment of creation takes place in heaven. Thus, this hymn embodies the breadth of the redemption story from Genesis to Revelation. Given the sweeping and shifting theological territory covered in this hymn, the refrain ties all the themes together with the reiteration of the hymn's central premise four times, "How great thou art!" After an extended court battle to determine the ownership of the text and music, Hine's English words and his musical setting were assigned to Manna Music. The publisher was able to show that the 1953 version of the gospel hymn was the "first, final and fixed form of the hymn" (Young, 1993, 410).

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-how-great-thou-art>

How Great Thou Art

Words: Carl Gustaf Boberg (b. Aug. 16, 1859; d. Jan. 7, 1940); English translation, Stuart Wesley Keen Hine (b. July 25, 1899; d. Mar. 14, 1989)

Music: a Swedish folk melody of unknown origin, adapted by Stuart Hine

1 O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works thy hands hath made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed;

Refrain:

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee:
How great thou art, how great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee:
How great thou art, how great thou art!

2 When through the woods and forest glades I wander,
I hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze; [Refrain]

3 But when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in,
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin; [Refrain]

4 When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation,
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, "My God, how great thou art!" [Refrain]

WordWise Hymns Comments on “How Great Thou Art”

Stuart Hine (1899-1989) gave us the English version. He lived long enough to see it become the most popular hymn in North America.

In Stanza 1, his original was:

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

It was gospel singer George Beverly Shea, instrumental in popularizing the hymn, who changed “works” to “worlds,” and “mighty” to “rolling.” He felt they were more descriptive, and effective. Mr. Hine was not pleased with the changes, but came to accept them in time. They have been adopted by most hymn books.

There are a couple of other stanzas of this great hymn that are virtually unknown and unsung today. In Carl Boberg’s original, they followed Stanza 3, and are definitely worthy of a look. Perhaps if you sing the hymn in your church, you could include the extra stanzas in the church bulletin and sing them.

O, when I see ungrateful man defiling
This bounteous earth, God’s gifts so good and great,
In foolish pride God’s holy name reviling
And yet, in grace, His wrath and judgment wait:

When burdens press, and seem beyond endurance,
Bowed down with grief, to Him I lift my face,
And then in love He brings me sweet assurance,
“My child! for thee sufficient is my grace.”

The Bible says, “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable [it cannot be fully fathomed or searched out]” (Ps. 145:3). Through all eternity, the saints will be discovering new and wonderful things about our great God. The original inspiration for the hymn was Carl Boberg’s experience of the awesome power of God revealed in nature.

This is particularly reflected in Stanzas 1 and 2, and it's a frequent theme of Scripture (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 19:1-6; 95:6; Col. 1:16).

Then the hymn turns to the theme of the greatness of our Lord and Saviour. First, there is the wonder of His sacrifice on the cross. It was there He took upon Himself the debt of our sins, so that we, through faith in Him, might be cleansed and forgiven (Isa. 53:4-6; Jn. 3:16; I Cor. 15:1-4).

Stanza 3...

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in,
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin

Finally (in the usual printed version of the hymn), in a stanza Stuart Hine added to Carl Boberg's original, we see the greatness of the future God has planned for His children. The Lord Jesus Christ is coming back again to take us to be with Him forever (Jn. 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; I Thess. 4:13-18).

The actual inspiration of Stanza 4 below is touching indeed. Mr. and Mrs. Hine were forced to leave their missionary work on the continent because of the war, and return to England. There they met many refugees who had fled Nazi cruelty. The frequent question they were asked is, "When are we going home?" This was Stuart Hine's answer:

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration,
And there proclaim, "My God, how great thou art!"
<https://wordwisehymns.com/2012/04/04/how-great-thou-art/>

Men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God.

John Calvin

God hath in Himself all power to defend you, all wisdom to direct you, all mercy to pardon you, all grace to enrich you, all righteousness to clothe you, all goodness to supply you, and all happiness to crown you.

Thomas Brooks

When men talk of a little hell, it is because they think they have only a little sin, and believe in a little Saviour; it is all little together. But when you get a great sense of sin, you want a great Saviour, and fell that, if you do not have Him, you will fall into a great destruction, and suffer a great punishment at the hands of the great God.

Charles Spurgeon

God has great things in store for His people; they ought to have large expectations.

Charles Spurgeon

Our culture does not help us to smash our graven image of the casual god. Our culture proclaims that God must be the essence of tolerance; He is chummy rather than holy...So long as our novelty license plates declare that "God is my co-pilot" we can be sure that we have not yet seen the King, Yahweh of hosts.

Dale Ralph Davis

John Calvin on Creation and God's Glory

Whether it is in the beauty, power, or complexity of creation, a taste of God's wonder is engraved on all things as an unmistakable testament of His incomprehensible glory. The glory of God has been disclosed in the whole workmanship of the universe: "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1) and "the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3).

There are two helpful ways to express the presentation of God's glory in creation. First, His glory is like a brilliant light shed abroad—even to the darkest reaches of the earth. This flashing light penetrates all men's minds (Rom. 1:19–20). It radiates richly throughout all the heavens, where the Lord's majesty is shed forth (Ps. 104:2). There is no place where the sparks of His glory cannot be discerned. Second, the glory of God is revealed in creation like an image in a mirror. The glory of the invisible God is reflected visibly by His creation (Heb. 11:3). This allows all to gaze upon the invisible nature of God, as portrayed in His creation. Whether God's glory appears like a light or like an image in a mirror, truly men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see Him.

Though God's whole creation displays His glory, it is man himself, as the pinnacle of creation, who reveals God's glory most explicitly.

He is a rare spectacle of God's power, goodness, and wisdom. Infants have tongues so eloquent to preach God's glory that there is no need at all for other orators (cf. Ps. 8:2). The human body—from its mouth and eyes to its very toenails—exhibits exquisite workmanship. Man's soul, in intelligence, imagination, memory, and even in dreaming, speaks of his Creator. The image of God has been so fully stamped upon men that, as all are adorned with an air of His glory, God readily testifies that He is the Father of all (Acts 17:28). God has made man His masterpiece, surpassing all else in creation. Further, as the church is conformed to the express image of the invisible God, Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3), the glory of God becomes more distinct.

For the unbeliever, the expression of God in creation cannot be missed, even if the darkness of his mind causes the image to appear clouded. For him, the glory of God displayed in creation is a testimony against unbelief (Rom. 1:19–20). In addition to the inward witness of the heart, God has provided innumerable evidences in the world of His existence and of man's duty to submit to his Creator (cf. Acts 14:16–17). The glory of God is inscribed in creation with bold letters, yet the unbeliever has exchanged the glory of the incorruptible for images of corruptible things (Rom. 1:23). This confusion of the creation with the Creator supplants the true God with a shadow deity, depriving God of His right as Creator and denying creation's proper place as an announcement of the glories of its Maker.

Though God sweetly attracts men with semblances of His glory, man's rashness and superficiality, joined with ignorance and darkness, have led to disdain for creation's testimony and, ultimately, to a rejection of the Creator Himself.

For the believer, the beauty of creation speaks of the majestic beauty of his God. With Scripture's revelation and the Spirit's work, the believer is able rightly to understand and appreciate the glory of God displayed in creation. He hears God's awesome voice upon the waters, breaking the cedars, shaking the wilderness, and causing new birth; thus, the believer worships the Lord in the beauty of holiness (Ps. 29). Examining creation brings him to praise and submit to his sovereign Creator—who sustains the mass of heaven and earth by His Word. God's nod alone shakes the heavens with thunderbolts; kindles the air with flashes; disturbs the earth with storms, and then silences them; and compels the sea to hang as though in midair, only to make it calm again. All of this incites reverential awe and adoration in the heart of every believer for the glorious God heralded by creation.

—adapted from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.5.1–3, 13–14; 1.6.14

The Names of God

Joel Beeke

“God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 4). Consequently, He is incomprehensible; man is incapable of thinking about all that God is. So any self-revelation of God is a gracious act whereby God condescends to man’s limited understanding.

God’s names or titles are one of the key ways by which God has revealed Himself. These names are more than just labels of identification; they are propositional descriptions of some aspects of His infinite Persons. Consequently, they are not used haphazardly and should not be passed over lightly in the reading of Scripture.

There are generally three categories of God’s names: (1) propositional, expressing some fact pertaining to the divine being, such as “God Most High” (Gen. 14:18–22) and “everlasting God” (Gen. 21:33); (2) historical, commemorating some encounter with God (such as Jehovahjireh, “the Lord will provide,” Gen. 22:14; see also Gen. 16:13; Ex. 17:15); and (3) personal, declaring some individual experience (“the God of Abraham,” “the fear of Isaac,” etc.). Here is a brief explanation of some common propositional names in the Old Testament:

Jehovah. This is God’s personal name, especially linked to His covenant grace and mercy. Derived from the verb “I am” (explained at the burning bush in Exodus 3), the name declares God’s self-sufficient independence, eternity, and sovereignty. Yet, amazingly, Jehovah is the principal name of God used in contexts of salvation. Although God is infinitely independent of anything outside of Himself, He is willing to have intimate fellowship with man, particularly through the covenant of grace. Jehovah, therefore, is often referred to as God’s “covenant name.” In the King James Version it is always translated in capital letters as “LORD” or occasionally as “God.”

God. This is the most general term for deity. The Hebrew word can be either singular (El) or plural (Elohim). Both forms stress God’s greatness. He is all-powerful; He possesses all authority; He is able to do whatever He pleases. This title also magnifies God’s transcendence; He is exalted far above all creation, including man. The plural form is a plural of majesty or excellence that highlights His power and greatness with even greater emphasis. Significantly, this is His first self-revelation: “In the beginning God . . .” (Gen. 1:1; see Ps. 19:1). He is the Creator.

Lord. The title Adonai describes God as the supreme Owner and Master of everything. Everything belongs to Him, and He governs everything according to His own purposes for His own glory. This name declares His absolute sovereignty or kingship. Earthly kings come and go, but the heavenly King reigns supreme forever (Isa. 6:1). All men and every nation, whether or not they acknowledge Him, are subject to His authority and accountable to Him. He is the Sovereign over all the earth; all will bow before Him (2 Kings 7:6; Ps. 110:5; Dan. 1:2; Amos 1:8). In the KJV this title is translated as “Lord” to distinguish it from Jehovah, which is rendered as “Lord.”

God Almighty. Although this title occurs most frequently in the patriarchal period, especially in Job, it is not limited to that period. The Hebrew is El Shaddai. Opinions differ regarding the translation, but most likely it means “the God who is sufficient.” He is fully able to keep every word of His promises, even when the fulfillment seems impossible. Nothing is too hard for El Shaddai. So even though the prospect of a great nation descending from Abraham seemed unlikely, behind the promise was El Shaddai, and thus the promise was certain (Gen. 17:1; 35:11–12).

Lord of Hosts. This is “Jehovah of armies,” a military expression identifying God as the “Commander” who has all authority and infinite rank to order His troops to accomplish His will. This title occurs most frequently during the period of the monarchy (Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Psalms, and the Prophets). Depending on the context, the army may refer to Israel, the angels, the heavenly bodies (stars and planets), or even all of creation. The point is that God has the power, authority, and resources at His command to do and to achieve all of His plans and purposes. No matter how great the promise or how serious the threat, the Lord of hosts will command and it will be done. Zechariah uses this expression more than fifty times in his prophecy to reinforce the certainty of the Lord’s every word (see also Isa. 6:1–4).

In closing...John Owen on Meditating on God’s Greatness

The scripture affirms that true humility is a result of knowing God and meditating on his awesome greatness...As John Owen says... “Be much in thoughtfulness of the *excellency* of the majesty of God and thine infinite, inconceivable distance from him. Many thoughts of it cannot but fill thee with a sense of thine own vileness which strikes deep at the root of any indwelling sin... Be much in thoughts of this nature, to abase the pride of thy heart, and to keep thy soul humble within thee. There is nothing will render thee a greater indisposition to be imposed on by the deceits of sin than such a frame of heart. Think greatly of the greatness of God.”

<https://bible.org/seriespage/13-particular-direction-8-meditate-god-s-greatness>