

With a little help from my friends

Read again John Ch 15 v11-17

I often break into song when in the house on my own – song that reflects the mood I'm in. If thinking about the past it may be a Beatles song or if returning from a church service it may be one of the hymns. "What a friend we have in Jesus" is a firm favourite and can be heard sung lustily on Songs of Praise on many occasions. It must be one of the most well known hymns across the denominations. Sing it now if you want to!

Here is a bit of background to the hymn.

Irish born Joseph Scriven (1819-1896) was 25 years old, in love and to be married. The day before his wedding his fiancé died in a tragic drowning accident. Heartbroken, Joseph sailed from his homeland to start a new life in Canada. While in Canada working as a teacher, he fell in love again and became engaged to Eliza Roche, a relative of one of his students. Once again, Joseph's hopes and dreams were shattered when Eliza became ill and died before the wedding could take place. Although we can only imagine the turmoil within this young man, history tells us that his faith in God sustained him. Soon after Eliza's death Joseph joined the Plymouth Brethren and began preaching for a Baptist church. He never married, but spent the remainder of his life giving all his time and money to helping the less fortunate and spreading the love and compassion of Jesus wherever he went. Around the same time that Eliza died, Joseph received word from Ireland that his mother was very ill. As he could not travel to be with her he wrote a letter and enclosed one of his poems entitled "What a friend we have in Jesus". Almost 30 years later the words were set to music and the rest, as we say, is history.

Joseph's friendship with Jesus was obviously very strong and brought him great comfort throughout his life. After his death, the citizens of Port Hope, Ontario, Canada, where he gave so much of himself, erected a monument to his life. It is amazing to think that the seemingly sad and relatively obscure life of one man has resulted in so many being comforted and reassured both in his own time and for more than a century after his death. The words of this well loved hymn continue to help and console in so many of life's situations that we feel are out of our control.

In John Ch 15 v 16 it says that Jesus chose us. He chose us to be privileged members of the family of God. "Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share" are familiar words from the hymn. The hymn continues "Jesus knows our every weakness – take it to the Lord in prayer". We can and must **"take everything to the Lord in prayer"** but having done that we must be willing to accept the answer God in his perfect wisdom and love sends to us.

For Discussion

1. Have the words of this hymn helped you at any time?
2. Do we have difficulty in accepting the answer to prayers if it is not the answer we asked for?
3. In our prayers do we always ask for things acceptable to God?

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