

November's hymn of the month

By
Bill Dagle

“When upon life’s billows you are tempest tossed”—ever felt that way at the end of the day? Well, I have and next to finding comfort in God’s word, the hymnal can be a great source of encouragement. Maybe, Johnson Oatman understood this more than most; and just maybe, that’s why he started writing hymns. Even though he spent most of his life in the mercantile and insurance businesses, Johnson Oatman Jr. would write over 5,000 hymns.

Born April 21, 1856, near Medford, New Jersey, young Johnson enjoyed standing on the Methodist church pew. He stood there to be near his father who was considered to have one of the best voices in northern New Jersey. Young Johnson wanted to be just like his dad. At the age of 19, Oatman was granted a license to preach in the Methodist Church and soon discovered he had a gift-- not a gift to preach, but a gift to write. So in 1892, he pick up his pen and, in short order, the country was singing *Higher Ground*, *No Not One*, *The Last Mile of the Way*, and *Count Your Blessings* which is considered to be his best song.

The music to *Count Your Blessings* has certainly given flight to Oatman’s words. Edwin Excell, the composer, is remembered for writing and composing over 2,000 gospel songs himself. Plus, through his publishing company in Chicago, he would edit 50 books by himself and 38 books for others. In his heyday, he was selling one and a half million books annually. Before his death in 1921, his company had already produced over ten million gospel song and anthem books. Edwin Excell worked with the great evangelists Sam Jones and Gypsey Smith in revival meetings across America.

Johnson Oatman would be given 66 years to play out the promise of his song here on earth. Then, on September 25, 1922, an older Johnson stepped into eternity from Norman, Oklahoma, leaving behind a message of hope in song, fulfilling Ephesians 5:19 & 20. This Thanksgiving, we have so much to be thankful for. We live in the greatest nation on earth. God guided the pilgrims to the new world. They came here to worship God as His word dictates. We have a nation founded under God and richly blessed these last 242 years. May we never forget our heritage and history and a song like this one can ensure we won’t. As my pastor, Cal Witham, has always said, “Count your many blessings. Name them ton by ton.”

When upon life’s billows you are tempest tossed, When you are dis-
courage, thinking all is lost, Count your many blessing, name them
one by one, And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Are you ever burdened with a load of care? Does the cross seem
heavy you are called to bear? Count your many blessings ev’ry
doubt will fly, And you will be singing as the days go by.

When you look at others with their lands of gold, Think that Christ has
promised you his wealth untold, Count your many blessings money
cannot buy Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.

So, amid the conflict, whether great or small, Do not be dis-
couraged, God is over all; Count your blessings, angels
Will attend, Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.

Chorus:

Count your blessings, name them one by one, Count your
blessings, we what God hath done; Count your blessings,
name them one by one, Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.

The hymn of the month for November: **Count Your Blessings**