

Near to the Heart of God- August's Hymn of the Month 2023

By
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Have you ever asked God, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” I’m sure we all have at one time or another done just that, especially, when we are the good person; and the bad thing has happened to us. Probably no greater example of balance on this subject has been illustrated in the Christian community than by Joni Ericksen Tada. Chances are you saw her interview on Larry King. What a fine example of a surrendered soul and a mature explanation of what it means to trust in Christ for *everything*.

Many years ago, in Bible school, a visiting speaker gave four possible answers to that impossible question. I jotted them in the flyleaf of my Bible. Bad things do happen sometimes because of sin (Galatians 6:7), to be made more like Jesus (I Peter 4:12-19), to comfort those who suffer likewise (II Corinthians 1:14), and to close the mouth of Satan (Job 1 & 2). When posed with the question, “What’s the best thing to do for the hurting person,” Joni’s answer to Larry was simple. “Just be there, make yourself available.” That answer made me think of a hymn.

Cleland B. McAfee, in 1901, was the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Chicago, Illinois. One day, to his shock and horror, he received the news that diphtheria had just claimed the lives of his two beloved nieces. To comfort his own soul and the hearts of the suffering family, Cleland wrote a hymn. On the day of the double funeral, he sang the hymn for the first time, with choking voice, outside the quarantined house of his brother, Howard. He wanted to be there for his hurting brother. A fellow pastor would carry the hymn out west to Berkeley, California. Eventually, Pastor McAfee would retire back east in Jaffrey, New Hampshire. Cleland McAfee accomplished many great things in his lifetime, but he is remembered most for writing a simple message in the form of a song that reminds us that when bad things happen to good people, the best place to be is *Near to the Heart of God*.

There is a place of quiet rest, Near to the heart of God
A place where sin cannot molest, Near to the heart of God
O Jesus, blest Redeemer, Sent from the heart of God
Hold us who wait before thee, Near to the heart of God.