

November's hymn of the month 2019

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.

Every generation has had to deal with suffering and loss. We live in a fallen world under the curse of sin. Our news reports remind us of this everyday. It’s no wonder that discouragement can become the norm. Yet for the Christian, there is a promise of help in Philippians 4:19. No matter how bad it gets, we have a promise for this life and for a life to come.

Johnson Oatman would be given 66 years to play out that promise 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. The message is a reminder that no matter how bad it gets, it will be worth it when we reach the other side.

When upon lift’s billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged thinking all is lost
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

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

When you look at others with their lands and 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 discouraged, God is over all
Count your many blessings angels will attend
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.

Refrain:

Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see 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 2019: **Count Your Blessings**

Bill Dagle, hymn historian, has been doing the stories behind the hymns since 1992 by way of radio, newspaper features, and personal appearances in local churches in the Northeast. The stories behind the hymns allow the listener and singer to understand the circumstances behind the writing of the hymns and how God has worked in special ways in the past to give us these wonderful songs today.