

**Sweet Hour of Prayer**—September's Hymn of the Month 2021

By  
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Twenty years ago on September the 11th, 2001, America was changed forever. Only once before in its history had the continental United States come under attack by a foreign power—during the War of 1812. Now again as never before, America was experiencing something we would never forget; and because of this second attack, America would be different. Many people had a lot to say following those days of 9/11, but one thing they all agreed on was we needed to pray for America. With these requests going up to God, I remembered a story I had read about a hymn—a hymn about praying and a hymn that was first given to America in New York City where it all began for the 9/11 remembrances.

On September 13, 1845, a poem of five stanzas appeared in a newspaper, the *New York Observer*, with a statement that the poem had been submitted by a Reverend Thomas Salmon, who had come to America in 1842 following a four year pastorate at Coleshill, Warwickshire, England. Salmon's account of the poem said that it was written by a blind preacher from Coleshill named W. W. Walford. Though lacking in formal education, Walford had a remarkable memory and a reputation for knowing the whole Bible by heart.

Apparently, some time later, Congregational clergyman, Thomas Salmon, met fellow clergyman, William Walford. Well-educated, Walford was president of Homerton Academy, a Congregational school, and was the author of several books. There is no evidence that he was blind. Were the two preachers, with the same names, actually one and the same? I guess we will never know for sure who wrote the poem, but one thing we do know: we need the hymn which came from that poem more than ever before.

First printed in New York City, this hymn, 156 years later almost to the day, would become the theme song for New York residents as they went to their knees, not because of defeat, but because of the realization that they needed God. The old hymn became a new song of hope and confidence that in the *Sweet Hour of Prayer*, God would hear and restore this great city and great country. As we look forward to what the Lord has for America, let's never forget that God loves us. In His son, Jesus Christ, we have the promise of eternal life offered to all who will "seek His face, believe His Word and trust His grace," words written 176 years ago, but as current as today's newspaper.

**Sweet hour of prayer, sweet of prayer,  
that calls me from a world of care  
And bids me at my Father's throne  
make all my wants and wishes known  
In seasons of distress and grief  
my soul has often found relief  
And oft escaped the tempter's snare  
by thy return, sweet hour of prayer.**