

EXPERIENCE PEACE THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD



BE STILL,
MY SOUL

ANGELA D. BAXTER

AUTHOR OF *AMAZING GRACE* AND
COME, THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING

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All scriptures referenced are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Lyrics of the hymn "Be Still, My Soul" are from the original English translation of the hymn.

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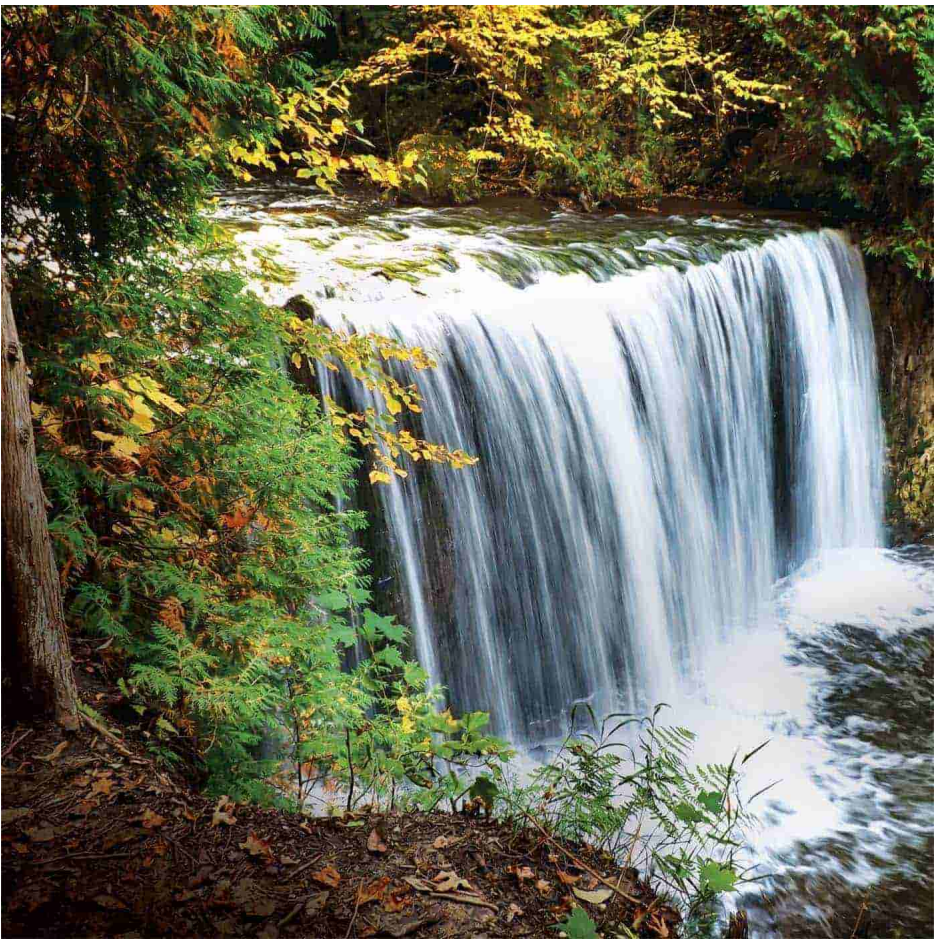
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HISTORY OF THE HYMN

“Stille, mein Wille; dein Jesus hilft siegen”

THESE WORDS BEGIN what would become the beloved Christian hymn “Be Still, My Soul,” first penned in German by Katharina Amalia Dorothea von Schlegel. She was born October 22, 1697. Her death date is unknown, though some place it in 1768. She lived in the town of Köthen in central Germany. We know that she was a devout Lutheran, and some believe she may have been a canoness for an evangelical women’s seminary. We also know that she contributed several hymn lyrics to the compilation *Neue Sammlung geistlicher Lieder* [A New Collection of Hymns], published in 1752. It was in this book that “*Stille, mein Wille*” first appeared.

ALTHOUGH FEW DETAILS are known about Katharina von Schlegel’s life, her name suggests that she came from an aristocratic family. She may have even spent time at the court of Prince Leopold of Köthen, where Johann Sebastian Bach was Kapellmeister, or music director. It’s possible that the two may have met.

THE HYMNS THAT Katharina wrote were an outgrowth of German Pietism, a movement that inspired a revival in German hymn writing that was both faithful to scripture and focused on personal experience and expressing profound emotions. Katharina von Schlegel is thought to be the leading female hymn writer of the time; she wrote nearly thirty hymns that were quite popular and widely used.

A HUNDRED YEARS LATER in 1855, "*Stille, mein Wille*" was translated into English by Jane Laurie Borthwick (1813–1897). Borthwick was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, and was a member of the Free Church of Scotland. She was a humanitarian, a strong supporter of foreign church missions, a hymn writer, and a translator of many German hymns into English. She is best known for the collection she and her sister compiled, *Hymns from the Land of Luther*, which included "Be Still, My Soul"—her most famous translation. Jane Borthwick's translation included five of the original six stanzas, though most hymnals today include just three.

"BE STILL, MY SOUL," like many hymns at the time, was originally sung or set to several tunes. One tune was *Unde et Memores* by William Henry Monk (1823–1889). It wasn't until the twentieth century that it would be paired with the music we're familiar with today—the *Finlandia Hymn*, a peaceful, hymn-like section of Jean Sibelius's patriotic symphonic poem *Finlandia*. Sibelius (1865–1957), widely considered Finland's

greatest composer, wrote *Finlandia, Op. 26* in 1899 and revised it in 1900. He would later arrange the *Finlandia Hymn* section of his orchestral piece for solo piano. The tune first accompanied “Be Still, My Soul” in the *Revised Church Hymnary* (London, 1927), and would first be seen in the United States in *The Hymnal* (1933) of the Presbyterian Church, USA.

THIS BEAUTIFUL HYMN continues to inspire today, standing as a testament of faith and a very personal meditation on the search for peace in one’s life, encouraging us to trust in God and his love for us, even in life’s darkest circumstances. The lyrics remind us that the Lord is always “on [our] side.” They offer us the promise of hope that enables us to face our trials and to live our lives with an attitude of faith, peace, and assurance. It truly is a prayer for peace for us all.



RESOURCES

Heinrich Ernst, ed., *Neue Sammlung geistlicher Lieder* (Waisenhaus, 1752), 784–85.

“History of Hymns: ‘Be Still, My Soul,’” Michael C. Hawn, *Discipleship Ministries*, accessed July 15, 2016, <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-be-still-my-soul>.

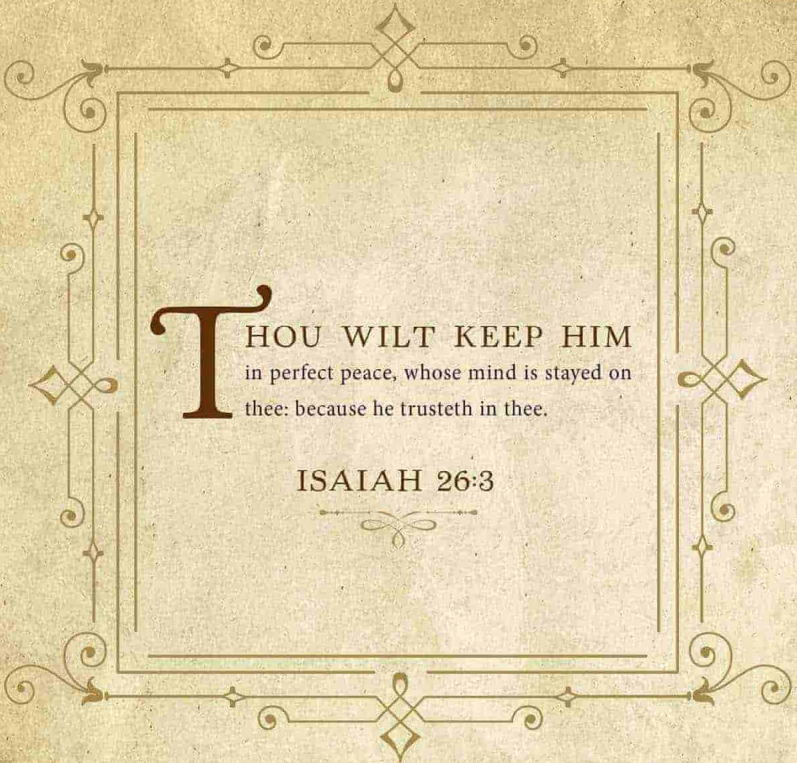
Merriam-Webster Online, s.v., “peace,” accessed July 15, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/peace>.

Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories: The Inspiring True Stories Behind 101 Favorite Hymns*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2012), 38.

Randy Petersen, *Be Still, My Soul: The Inspiring Stories Behind 175 of the Most-Loved Hymns* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 36–37.

A serene landscape featuring a bright sunburst effect over a grassy field and trees. The sun is positioned in the upper center, creating a strong glow and lens flare that illuminates the scene. The foreground is a lush green field, and the background shows dense foliage and a clear sky with soft clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and uplifting.

BE *still,*
MY SOUL:



THOU WILT KEEP HIM
in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on
thee: because he trusteth in thee.

ISAIAH 26:3






TRUST IN THE
LORD, and do good; so
shalt thou dwell in the land,
and verily thou shalt be fed.

DELIGHT THYSELF also
in the Lord; and he shall give thee
the desires of thine heart.

COMMIT THY WAY
unto the Lord; trust also in him;
and he shall bring it to pass.

PSALM 37:3-5





THE *Lord* IS ON
THY SIDE.

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