

Song Story #24 – *What A Friend*

I was very blessed to grow up with both Christian parents and Christian grandparents on my Dad's side. My grandparents were a part of the Salvation Army church, which is a Protestant denomination with a big focus on service and caring for the poor and addicted. They use a military motif in how they are structured in order to draw attention to the spiritual battle we are waging.

My grandparents lived in the Minneapolis area and our family moved a couple times, but always lived about 2 hours from them. We would typically go visit them every two or three weekends when I was a child. So they were a big part of my life. And being at their home often on weekends meant that we would also attend the Salvation Army church with them or the Salvation Army Men's Social Service Center where my grandpa worked with addicted and homeless men.

My first memories of the great old hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" are in that Salvation Army context. It was lovely to hear so many of these dedicated older folks sing that song with great sincerity and have the Salvation Army brass band, led by my grandpa Fred, accompany that and all the hymns! And then I regularly sang it in the various Baptist and Christian and Missionary Alliance churches that my parents attended as I was growing up. That old song had such comforting and hopeful lyrics as we sang its sort of lazy melody. This, and so many other old hymns I grew up with, embedded themselves in my mind and heart and I can sing so many from memory even now.

So, years later as I was writing songs for our multi-ethnic Heart of the City Band, I thought that taking those hopeful and joyful lyrics and giving them a more upbeat melody and feel - along with some lyrics and a bridge of my own - would be a great addition to the original. I would never want to replace the original. This song was just another way to sing the same message in a different style. When we sang it and recorded it with the Heart of the City Band, our African American vocalists, Nancy Ellis and Barbara Van Leer, brought a whole other level of passion to this song! Here are the lyrics of the original "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and the lyrics to my song, "What a Friend":

What a Friend We Have in Jesus by Charles Converse & Joseph Scriven

1. What a friend we have in Jesus all our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer
Oh, what peace we often forfeit
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer

2. Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged. Take it to the Lord in prayer
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the Lord in prayer

3. Are we weak and heavy-laden, burdened with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there.

What a Friend

Words and Music by Dan Adler

1. Oh-oh what a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sin and grief to bear
Oh and what a privilege to carry-y everything to our God in prayer

2. When we go through trials and temptations, and there is trouble everywhere
We should never let it steal our courage. Just take it to the Lord in prayer!

CHORUS: What a friend we have in Jesus

What a friend IS HE

What a friend we have in Jesus

He is so good to you and me

What a friend we have in Jesus

What a friend IS HE

What a friend we have in Jesus

Oh, what a friend, what a friend is He! WHAT A FRIEND! WHAT A FRIEND!

3. We could never find a friend so faithful who will share the burdens that we bear
Jesus knows our every single weakness, so we can bring them to Him in prayer

4. When you're feelin' weak and heavy laden, burdened with a heavy load of care
Just remember Jesus is our Refuge, take all your burdens to Him in prayer! (to Chorus)

BRIDGE: He is a faithful, faithful Friend! His love will never, never end!

He won't deceive us! He'll never leave us! It's more than we can comprehend!

He took away our sin and shame, when on the cross He took the blame!

It's so amazing! That's why we're praising Jesus, the Name above all Names!

(to Chorus)

Copyright 2009, Heart of the City Music