

"Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart" History

Henry Smith Jr. was born in Crossnore, North Carolina. Though he started piano lessons in his early years, his brother's guitar piqued his interest in music. He taught himself to play by reading a guitar manual and soon began composing songs.

During his years as a student at King's College, Bristol, Tennessee, music became more important to him, deciding that *"I only wanted to write songs for Christ."*

"Give Thanks" was written in 1978 in response to a sermon given by the pastor at Williamsburg New Testament Church, Virginia, preaching on 2 Corinthians 6:10; *"sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything."* It was a time of unemployment, financial insecurity, and an uncertain future due to a degenerative visual impairment that would eventually lead to his becoming legally blind. No doubt he found strength in Paul's words, 2 Corinthians 12:10; *"That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

Soon afterward, Henry and his future wife Cindy, sang the song at the church on several occasions. A military couple attending the church took the song with them to Germany, where they were stationed. The song then developed a life of its own.

But during those early years of the song's use, the composer became unknown. Occasionally credit was ascribed to someone else. It was not until 1986 that a friend brought Smith a cassette tape of a recording of the song by Integrity Music, who had listed the author as "unknown." Henry contacted the publisher. They informed him that they had been trying to locate the composer because the song had been recorded more than fifty times and published in several collections.

The Worshiping Church (Hustad, 1990, no. 496) may have been the first standard hymnal to carry it. Evangelical British/American hymn writer Bryan Jeffery Leech, heard the song at Billy Graham's "Mission England" Crusade in 1989 and recommended it to the hymnal committee. It started to spread beyond Evangelicals. Twenty-first-century hymnals continue to publish the song, attesting to its sustained use.

Contemporary Christian artist, Don Moen, met Henry Smith in Washington, D.C., at an Integrity Music conference and played a recording of the song in Russian. Moen had no idea Henry and his wife, Cindy, were in the audience. *"My wife and I began to weep. We were overwhelmed to hear my song in that language."*

Each section of the song concludes with a **"because"** - *"because he's given Jesus Christ his Son"* - *"because of what the Lord has done for us."*

The scriptural basis for whole-hearted thanks is abundant throughout the song.

Psalms 9:1; *"I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart,"*

Psalms 86:12; *"I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever."*

Psalms 111:1; *"Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly."*

Psalms 138:1; *"I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart; before the gods. I will sing your praise."*

Smith has composed approximately three hundred worship songs, but **"Give Thanks"** is the only one to be published and extensively recorded.

