

Give thanks with a grateful heart

Henry Smith 1952–

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Song 478 from *Praise and Worship*
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Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One,
give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ his Son.

And now let the weak say 'I am strong',
let the poor say 'I am rich'
because of what the Lord has done for us.

Give thanks. Give thanks. Give thanks.



Henry Smith Jr (b. 1952) has composed approximately three hundred worship songs, but “Give Thanks” (1978) is the only one to be published and extensively recorded. During the early years of the song’s use, the composer was unknown. Occasionally credit was ascribed to someone else. Smith 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. 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.

Contemporary Christian artist **Don Moen** (b. 1950) met Henry Smith in Washington, D.C., at an Integrity Music conference and played a recording of the song in Russian. “My wife and I began to weep. We were overwhelmed to hear my song in that language. Moen had no idea we were in the audience.”

The song’s strength lies in the text’s biblical foundation, rhetorical construction, and the music’s coherence. The biblical underpinnings are cited above. The effective repetition of the imperative “Give thanks” at the beginning of three successive lines in the first part of the refrain (*anaphora*) has a cumulative effect. The composer repeats section one, giving a total of six reiterations of “Give thanks.” The scriptural basis for whole-hearted thanks is abundant throughout the Psalms (9:1; 86:12; 111:1; 138:1). The second part of the refrain continues effectively with “let the weak” and “let the poor” in successive lines. Each section concludes with a “because” clause that balances the *anaphora* of the earlier phrases: “because he’s given Jesus Christ his Son” (section one); “because of what the Lord has done for us” (section two).

Carl Daw Jr. identifies the characteristics of the effective melody: “Much of the coherence of this tune comes from the use of sequences. The second phrase, for example, is a third-lower sequence of the first phrase. Then in the repeated middle section there are three successive phrases, each one step lower than the preceding one.”. In short, the song is a perfect blend of simplicity, symmetry, and artistry.

Henry Smith composed the song during 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, “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” (2 Corinthians 12:10, NIV).

source: Discipleship Ministries www.umcdiscipleship.org/...give-thanks...
sung by: Don Moen www.youtube.com/watch?v=blbslHDqceY