

Week 3: The Gaithers

He Touched Me

Text and Tune: Bill Gaither (1936–), 1963

- Born and raised in Alexandria, Indiana, a small rural town
 - Formed the Bill Gaither Trio in 1956, while a student at Anderson University (also in Indiana)
 - Following graduation with an English major and music minor, started work as a high school English teacher in 1959
 - After difficulty maintaining both teaching and music careers, became a full-time musician in 1967
 - “He Touched Me” was his first major success in songwriting, recorded by artists from Jimmy Durante to Elvis Presley
 - The song idea was suggested by a minister in the Church of God, the father of his friend and fellow singer Doug Oldham
 - Anderson University is affiliated with the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)
 - A variety of groups all claim the name “Church of God” - this one originated out of the Holiness movement of early Methodism, combined with a commitment to pacifism
1. Given that this was the Gaithers’ first big hit, what qualities do you see (in both text and tune) that account for its popularity? What is the central message?
 - a. The text is general without being generic - relatable by almost anyone and captures the core of the Christian story
 - i. Built off of scripture (Matthew 8:2-3, Luke 8:43-44)
 - b. The melody is shaped around the phrase “he touched me”, and helps cement it as a memorable musical catch
 - c. The message is two-part, both what Jesus did for us (“made me whole”) and how we respond to it (“never cease to praise Him”)

The Old Rugged Cross Made The Difference

Text and Tune: Bill Gaither (1936–), Gloria Gaither (1942–), 1970

- Gloria grew up in the Battle Creek area of Michigan and even worked for the Kellogg company for a time
 - Also attended Anderson University and studied English, French, and Sociology
 - Met Bill when they were both teachers at Alexandria Monroe High School, and married in 1962
 - They have co-written countless songs together, where Gloria typically provides the words and Bill the music
 - In addition, Gloria is a published author of over 40 books, half of them for children
1. This hymn shares a similar theme with “He Touched Me” but approached in a different way. What are the main differences you see between the two? Which do you find more effective?
 - a. “The Old Rugged Cross” uses more of a story-telling approach with deeper imagery
 - b. “He Touched Me” almost oversimplifies the issue and says nothing about “the Giver of Life [moving] inside”; it’s a process, not a magic wand
 - c. They both share the concept of Jesus not just transforming, but *fulfilling* our lives (see “shell of a man” and “made me whole”)
 - d. They both show praise as the appropriate response to God’s work in our lives
 2. The title and chorus directly reference the classic gospel hymn “The Old Rugged Cross” from the early 1900s. What connections between the two songs do you notice?
 - a. Both rely on highly visual imagery
 - i. Gaither: metaphors of an empty room, outstretched nail-marked hand
 - ii. Bennard: hill far away, blood-stained cross
 - b. Both focus on strong contrasts
 - i. Gaither: desperation, anger, sadness vs love, warmth, laughter
 - ii. Bennard: shame and suffering vs beauty and glory

Hear My Song, Lord

Text and Tune: Bill Gaither (1936–), Gloria Gaither (1942–), 1989

- In addition to continuing to perform and record, formed the Gaither Music Company serving as record label, publisher, and retail store
 - Formed the Gaither Vocal Band in 1981 to build on the success of the Bill Gaither Trio
 - Many famous contemporary Christian musicians launched their careers touring with the Gaithers, including Michael W. Smith, Sandi Patty, Steve Green, Amy Grant, and others
 - In 1991, debuted the Gaither Homecoming, a video and record series (and later tour) compiling the best of Southern gospel music
1. In what ways do you see a modern “praise chorus” influence on this song? At the same time, are there other features that make it still seem “Gaither-like”?
- a. Unlike the others, the tune is not typical Southern gospel
 - i. Continuous triplet feel throughout
 - ii. Lack of secondary dominant harmonies and chromatic motion
 - b. The scriptural influence is still easy to see:
 - i. Text reads very much like a Psalm, similarities to Psalm 23 (“I will not fear ... every need I have, you satisfy”)
 - ii. Quotes about “living water” (John 4:10) and “bread of life” (John 6:35)
 - iii. Also music: immediately after the first communion (bread and wine), Jesus and the disciples *sing together* (see Matthew 26:26-30)
 - c. An emphasis on praise as a response to God (“you fill me with praise”, “I’ll praise him forever...”, “I will never cease to praise him”)