



**CHURCHES TOGETHER  
IN CENTRAL BROMLEY**

# CTCB Lent Course 2021

## *My Favourite Hymn*

### Session 5: Fanny J Crosby

#### Starter activity (in small groups)

What have been some of the highlights so far of this course? How would you like to see your Christian life change as a result of the hymns and Bible passages we have considered in our sessions so far?

#### A modern take on Fanny J Crosby

One Lent Course attendee has recommended the Iris DeMent album *Lifeline*, which includes three songs by Fanny J Crosby. They can be previewed on YouTube here: [Near the Cross](#) / [Blessed Assurance](#) / [Hide Thou Me](#)

[Follow this link to buy the album on Amazon](#)

Interested in hymns? Then this might be for you...

The **Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland** has four principal aims:

- Encouraging study and research in hymnody;
- Promoting good standards of hymn-singing;
- Encouraging the discerning use of hymns and songs in worship;
- Sponsoring relevant publications.

For further details visit the Society's website at <https://hymnsocietygbi.org.uk>.

*For further details about this course or other events please contact:*

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## Bible passages for reflection and discussion

Fanny J Crosby's hymn *Blessed Assurance* picks up some themes from the letter to the Hebrews, which themselves relate to passages in the Old Testament such as this one from Leviticus.

### *Leviticus 16:2-3, 11-13*

*New International Version*

<sup>2</sup> The LORD said to Moses: 'Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.

<sup>3</sup> 'This is how Aaron is to enter the Most Holy Place: he must first bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. [...]

<sup>11</sup> 'Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. <sup>12</sup> He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. <sup>13</sup> He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the tablets of the covenant law, so that he will not die.'

### *Hebrews 10:19-26*

*New International Version*

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Now consider the following questions in your small group:

1. The Leviticus passage emphasises the risky nature of having a relationship with the true God. Verse 2 says that Aaron and his successors are taking their life in their hands every time they come into God's presence. How does that fit with the truth of God's love?
2. Many people (whether religious or not) have an idea of atoning for their sins. What are some of the ways people try to do this? What mechanism does God set out in Leviticus 16:11, and what is surprising about it? Is it better or worse than the other ways people try to do it?
3. The writer of Hebrews contrasts two different ways of relating to God – the old and the new. Looking at Leviticus 16:11 and Hebrews 10:19-20, what is the most obvious difference between the two? Which is better?
4. The word *assurance* in Hebrews 10:22 is the theme for one of Fanny J Crosby's best known hymns. How would you define or explain it in your own words? Why is it important for the Christian life?
5. The final verses of the Hebrews passage remind us of several ways we can respond to the sacrifice of Jesus. How can you put one or two of these into practice in the week ahead? Try to be specific!

### Time to share

Choose your favourite one of the hymns we have considered this evening, and try and work out three different things you like about it. Then share them with the rest of your group.

#### Closing prayer

O God, the blessed assurance of all who trust in you:  
We give you thanks for your servant Fanny Crosby,  
and pray that we, inspired by her words and example,  
may rejoice to sing ever of your love, praising our Saviour;  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## Fact file: *Fanny J Crosby (1820-1915)*

Frances Jane Crosby was an American lyricist best known for her Protestant Christian hymns. A lifelong Methodist, she was one of the most prolific hymnists in history, writing over 8,000 despite being blind since infancy. (She referred to her disability in a poem: “Oh, what a happy soul I am, / although I cannot see! / I am resolved that in this world / Contented I will be.”)

To this day, the vast majority of American hymnals contain her work. Some of her best known songs include *Blessed Assurance*, *Jesus Is Tenderly Calling You Home*, *Praise Him*, *Praise Him*, and *To God Be the Glory*. Because some publishers were hesitant to have so many hymns by one person in their hymnals, Crosby used nearly 100 different pseudonyms during her career.

In the summer of 1843, Crosby met Alexander van Alstyne Jr, whom she subsequently married. The van Alstynes had a daughter named Frances who died in her sleep soon after birth. Crosby's hymn *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* was inspired by her death. Crosby never spoke publicly about being a mother, aside from mentioning it in a few interviews towards the end of her life: “God gave us a tender babe but the angels came down and took our infant up to God and to His throne.”

There was a cholera epidemic in New York City from May to November 1849, and Crosby remained to nurse the sick rather than leaving the city. According to one biographer: “In this atmosphere of death and gloom, Fanny became increasingly introspective over her soul's welfare. She began to realize that something was lacking in her spiritual life. She knew that she had gotten wrapped up in social, political, and educational reform, and did not have a true love for God in her heart.”

Crosby was a longtime member of the Sixth Avenue Bible Baptist Church in Brooklyn. She served as a consecrated Baptist missionary, deaconess, and lay preacher. She wrote hymns together with her minister Robert Lowry, such as *All the Way My Saviour Leads Me* and many others.

During her lifetime Fanny Crosby was one of the best known women in the United States, and often met with presidents, generals, and other dignitaries. She played the hymn *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* at President Grant's funeral in 1885. On her tombstone are the words from her own hymn, “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.”

Adapted from [www.satucket.com/lectionary/fanny\\_crosby.htm](http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/fanny_crosby.htm)  
and [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanny\\_Crosby](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanny_Crosby)

Five well-known hymns by Fanny J Crosby  
and her contemporaries

To God be the glory, great things he has done!  
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,  
who yielded his life an atonement for sin,  
and opened the life-gate that all may go in:

*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the earth hear his voice!  
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the people rejoice!  
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;  
And give him the glory - great things he has done!*

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood!  
To every believer the promise of God!  
The vilest offender who truly believes,  
that moment from Jesus forgiveness receives:

Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,  
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;  
but purer, and higher, and greater will be  
our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see:

*Frances Jane van Alstyne (Fanny Crosby) (1820-1915)*

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,  
there is no shadow of turning with thee;  
thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not,  
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be.

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
all I have needed thy hand hath provided,  
great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!*

Summer and winter, and spring-time and harvest,  
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,  
join with all nature in manifold witness  
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

*Thomas O Chisholm (1866-1960)*

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine; oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

*This is my story, this is my song, praising my Saviour all the day long.  
This is my story, this is my song, praising my Saviour all the day long.*

Perfect submission, perfect delight, visions of rapture now burst on my sight;  
Angels descending, bring from above echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Saviour am happy and blest;  
Watching and waiting, looking above, filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

*Frances Jane van Alstyne (Fanny Crosby) (1820-1915)*

1 There is a green hill far away,  
without a city wall,  
where the dear Lord was crucified,  
who died to save us all.

2 We may not know, we cannot tell,  
what pains he had to bear,  
but we believe it was for us  
he hung and suffered there.

3 He died that we might be forgiven,  
he died to make us good,  
that we might go at last to heaven,  
saved by his precious blood.

4 There was no other good enough  
to pay the price of sin;  
he only could unlock the gate  
of heaven, and let us in.

5 O dearly, dearly has he loved,  
and we must love him too,  
and trust in his redeeming blood,  
and try his works to do.

*Cecil Frances Alexander  
(née Humphreys) (1818-1895)*

Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on his gentle breast;  
There by his love o'ershaded, sweetly my soul shall rest.  
Hark! 'tis the voice of angels borne in a song to me,  
Over the fields of glory, over the jasper sea.

*Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on his gentle breast;  
There by his love o'ershaded, sweetly my soul shall rest.*

Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe from corroding care,  
Safe from the world's temptations; sin cannot harm me there.  
Free from the blight of sorrow, free from my doubts and fears;  
Only a few more trials, only a few more tears!

Jesus, my heart's dear Refuge, Jesus has died for me;  
Firm on the Rock of Ages ever my trust shall be.  
Here let me wait with patience, wait till the night is o'er;  
Wait till I see the morning break on the golden shore.

*Frances Jane van Alstyne (Fanny Crosby) (1820-1915)*