

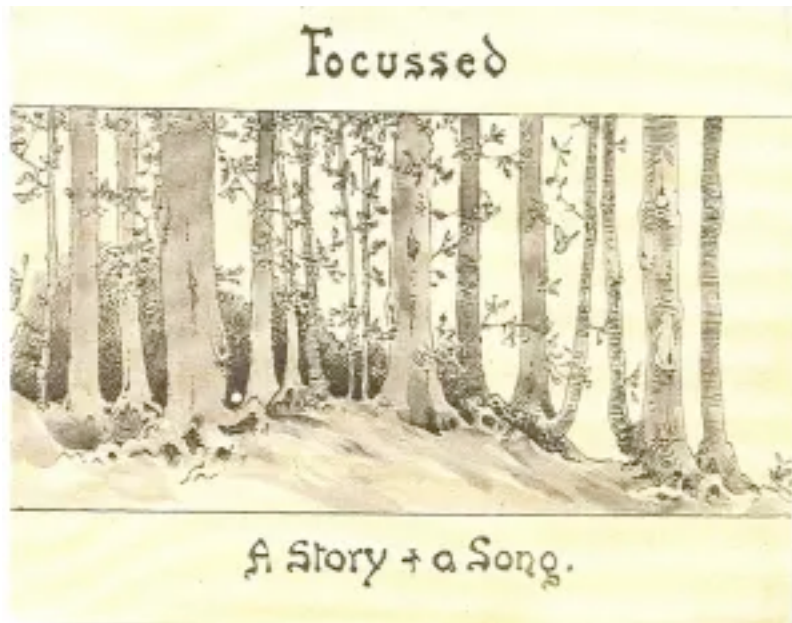
CFBC Hymns Class 41

Helen Lemmel (1863-1961)

and Isabella Lilius Trotter (1853–1928)

“I am fine in the things that count”

Helen Lemmel



Gathered up, focused lives, intent on one aim – Christ – these are the lives on which God can concentrate blessedness. It is “all for all” by a law as unvarying as any law that governs the material universe.

Focussed: A Story & A Song

A Story & A Song (Edited)

Have you ever wondered how a song comes into being? Which comes first? The words or the music?

The story of the song “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” is about two women – Lilius Trotter and Helen Lemmel – each remarkable in her own right, and how their unique talents merged to create one of the most beloved spiritual songs of the 19th century, enduring to this day.

While they never met each other, Helen, born a decade later, in 1863, had much in common with Liliias. Like Liliias, she was born in England, however of modest means her father being a Wesleyan Methodist pastor. She had a normal childhood which was changed enormously when in 1875, at the age of 12, her family emigrated to the United States eventually settling in Wisconsin. She, like Liliias, was artistically gifted. A great musical talent was identified in young Helen, gaining her a reputation as a brilliant singer. Music was her passion. As a young woman she traveled widely throughout the Midwest giving concerts in many churches.

In 1904, at the age of 40, she moved to Seattle, Washington, where she was able to merge her remarkable literary abilities with her love of music becoming the music critic for the Seattle-Post Intelligencer.

She moved to Germany in 1907 where she spent the next four years continuing her study of voice with private lessons. While in Germany, she met and married a wealthy European.

Upon the completion of her studies, she moved back to the Midwest (1911) where she entered an active period of concertizing throughout the United States. She gave concerts in churches and traveled on the Chautauqua circuit, a popular performance venue of that era. She was greatly in demand throughout the United States, performing her own patriotic compositions for soldiers in Military Camps as well as providing programs of her own stories and songs of a wide range of subjects.

Even as she experienced success in secular venues, her first love and loyalty was to her Christian faith. She continued to give concerts in churches and eventually became the vocal music teacher at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois, even leading a woman's choral group for Billy Sunday during the peak of his career. At the same time she continued her literary pursuits writing hymns as well as stories and poems for children. Her book for children, *Story of the Bible* was met with wide acclaim.

Then a tragedy struck that would have a life-altering effect. She was diagnosed with an affliction that would result in blindness. Her husband, unable to cope with that reality, abandoned the marriage, leaving her to cope on her own. What might have been a debilitating experience physically as well as emotionally, only turned her more completely to God and to her most compelling vocation...the composing of hymns from the depths of her heart and life experience. She authored around 500 hymns, lyrics and music, many in circulation to this day.

She moved back to Seattle, Washington upon retirement where, living in reduced circumstances, she continued to write out her soul in poems set to music. Now

totally blind, she would pick out the notes on a small keyboard and call upon friends to record them before she forgot them...

How then did collaboration between Liliastrotter and Helen Lemmel take place? How did one song merge from two women who never met each other? Liliastrotter wrote and Helen “discovered” the little leaflet, “Focussed,” almost 2 decades later. It contained a statement that had profound impact on her: “*So then turn your eyes upon Him, look full into His face and you will find that the things of earth will acquire a strange new dimness.*” The rest is told in Helen’s own words: “I stood still and singing in my soul and spirit was the chorus, with no one conscious moment of putting word to word to make rhyme or note to note to make melody.” A few years later, it was published in a book of 67 songs written by Helen, *Glad Tidings*, used as the songbook for the Keswick Convention – where it became their theme song, the summer of 1924, launching its popularity.

How could Liliastrotter know when she set off for a brief time alone with God (1901) that her reflection...would become the inspiration for a song that would withstand the test of time, speaking to one generation after another of the importance of “*turning full face to Jesus.*”

<https://liliasstrotter.wordpress.com/2015/06/10/a-story-a-song-2/>

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus By Helen Lemmel (Edited)

“Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” has become a familiar hymn, that has been widely used in Christian circles to challenge believers musically, with the necessity of making Christ the paramount priority in their lives, and then living each day with eternity’s values in view.

The author and composer of this hymn, Helen H. Lemmel, relates that one day, in 1918, a missionary friend gave her a tract entitled “Focused.” The pamphlet contained these words: “So then, turn your eyes upon Him, look full into His face and you will find that the things of earth will acquire a strange new dimness. “

These words made a deep impression upon Helen Lemmel. She could not dismiss them from her mind. She recalls this experience following the reading of that tract...

“Suddenly, as if commanded to stop and listen, I stood still, and singing in my soul and spirit was the chorus, with not one conscious moment of putting word to word to make rhyme, or note to note to make melody. The verses were written the same week...”

The hymn was first published, in 1918...Since that time, the song has been included in most evangelical hymnals and has been translated into many languages around the world...

How easy it becomes even for those of us who profess to be faithful followers of Christ to get caught up in the “things of earth,” so that our heavenly vision and values become blurred and dull. This often happens even when we are active in our Christian activities, we become so involved in merely doing things for God that we miss the real blessing of enjoying the personal fellowship of Christ Himself in our daily lives.

“I’ve seen the face of Jesus... He smiled in love on me;
It filled my heart with rapture, my soul with ecstasy.
The scars of deepest anguish ... were lost in glory bright;
I’ve seen the face of Jesus ... it was a wondrous sight!
Oh, glorious face of beauty, Oh gentle touch of care;
If here it is so blessed, what will it be up there?”
–Selected

<https://womenofchristianity.com/turn-your-eyes-upon-jesus-by-helen-lemmel-hymn-story/>

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus: The Story Behind the Hymn (Lilias Trotter)

David Fielding

This devotional hymn was written in 1918 by Helen Lemmel, an accomplished hymnwriter and soloist, the daughter of a Methodist Minister. She was moved to write the words and music after reading a small booklet by Lilias Trotter entitled “Focussed” and hearing of her life story. She titled the hymn “The Heavenly Vision” but it is best known by the first line of the refrain, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus”.

Both the hymn and the booklet that inspired it have been a challenge to the focus and devotion of Christians over almost a century. The life of Lilias Trotter is of great interest. Her own devotion to her Saviour, faith and labour of love speak volumes in our day of easy going Christianity.

In her biography of Lilias Trotter, Patricia St John describes the home life into which Lilias was born in 1853 as, “... *the happy disciplined life of the Victorian upper classes; godly, serious, kind to the poor... sheltered... a stable home surrounded by beauty and culture.*” Lilias wanted for nothing. She had a good education, travelled widely, she had a bright and inquisitive mind and loved the

beauty of plants, flowers and nature. Her father was a wealthy banker and they lived in high society in the very best part of London.

Sadly, when Liliias was only 12 years old, her Father died and she was devastated at this great loss. However it was through this time of sadness that she was cast upon God for comfort and consolation and came to know Jesus Christ as her Saviour and friend. One biographer says that, *“Through the very hardest thing in her life God brought her soul into blossom.”* The change in her life through her conversion to Christ saw her develop a great gift of love and sympathy that was boundless in its expression.

As she grew into a young woman, that love for others was channelled into work in London with the YWCA among many unfortunate women who found themselves alone, penniless and exploited.

At the age of 23 she travelled with her mother to Venice and by God’s providence came into contact with John Ruskin, the famous writer and art critic. Ruskin was tremendously impressed with her ability to draw and paint and she spent time in his company at his home in the English Lake District. He was convinced that, *“if she would give her life to painting she could become the greatest painter of the nineteenth century and do things that would be immortal.”*

After the death of her mother in 1878 and considerable wrestling of heart, Liliias became convinced that God was calling her to serve Him. Interest in foreign missions was high following the Moody and Sankey missions and the remarkable commitment of seven Cambridge graduates to pioneer missionary work in China. It was at a missionary meeting that she felt the clear call of God to go to bring the Gospel to the Arab tribes of Algeria.

Despite a heart condition diagnosed prior to her departure, on the 5th March 1888 she left for North Africa and spent the remaining 40 years of her life working among the Arab Muslims of Algeria. Her work was truly remarkable. As a European white woman working mainly with other female colleagues in a pioneer mission among strongly traditional Muslims, the chances of her achieving any success were considered impossible. One biographer remarks that two words characterize Liliias’s work *“inexhaustible and indiscourageable”*.

Eventually using up all of her own wealth, she founded and maintained the Algiers Mission Band. Her ability in drawing and painting became an integral part in the communication of the gospel, illustrating tracts and booklets specifically designed to reach the Arab culture. Her incredible ability to learn languages, breakdown cultural barriers, organise, write and travel long distances across difficult terrain put her into the same category as other “unique” female missionary names such as Amy Carmichael, Gladys Aylward etc.

An extract from her booklet “Focussed”, which inspired this hymn, is quoted below and in reading it we might ask ourselves just how focussed on Jesus Christ we are today. How great is our need to turn our eyes fully upon Him.

“... if the Sun of Righteousness has risen upon our hearts, there is an ocean of grace and love and power lying all around us, an ocean to which all earthly light is but a drop, and it is ready to transfigure us...Gathered up, focussed lives, intent on one aim – Christ – these are the lives on which God can concentrate blessedness. It is “all for all” by a law as unvarying as any law that governs the material universe...

Satan knows well the power of concentration; if a soul is likely to get under the sway of the inspiration, “this one thing I do,” he will turn all his energies to bring in side-interests that will shatter the gathering intensity.

And they lie all around, these interests. Never has it been so easy to live in half a dozen good harmless worlds at once – art, music, social science, games, the following of some profession, and so on. And between them we run the risk of drifting about, the “good” hiding the “best” even more effectually than it could be hidden by downright frivolity with its smothered heart-ache at its own emptiness.

It is easy to find out whether our lives are focussed, and if so, where the focus lies. Where do our thoughts settle when consciousness comes back in the morning? Where do they swing back when the pressure is off during the day? Does this test not give the clue? Then dare to have it out with God – and after all, that is the shortest way. Dare to lay bare your whole life and being before Him, and ask Him to show you whether or not all is focussed on Christ and His glory. Dare to face the fact that unfocussed, good and useful as it may seem, it will prove to have failed of its purpose.

What does this focussing mean? Study the matter and you will see that it means two things – gathering in all that can be gathered, and letting the rest drop...

Are we ready for a cleavage to be wrought through the whole range of our lives... All aims, all ambitions, all desires, all pursuits – shall we dare to drop them if they cannot be gathered sharply and clearly into the focus of “this one thing I do”?

Will it not make life narrow, this focussing? In a sense, it will – just as the mountain path grows narrower, for it matters more and more, the higher we go, where we set our feet – but there is always, as it narrows, a wider and wider outlook, and purer, clearer air. Narrow as Christ’s life was narrow, this is

*our aim; narrow as regards self-seeking, broad as the love of God to all around.
Is there anything to fear in that?*

And in the narrowing and focussing, the channel will be prepared for God's power – like the stream hemmed between the rock-beds, that wells up in a spring – like the burning glass that gathers the rays into an intensity that will kindle fire. It is worthwhile to let God see what He can do with these lives of ours, when "to live is Christ."

Turn full your soul's vision to Jesus, and look and look at Him, and a strange dimness will come over all that is apart from Him, and the Divine sanctifying work by which God's saints are made, even in this 20th century, will lay hold of you. For "He is worthy" to have all there is to be had in the heart that He has died to win"

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Saviour,
And life more abundant and free!

Refrain:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

Through death into life everlasting
He passed, and we follow Him there;
O'er us sin no more has dominion—
For more than conquerors we are!

His Word shall not fail you—He promised;
Believe Him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!

Words & music by Helen Howarth Lemmel based on the writing of Isabella Lilius Trotter (1853–1928) – pioneer Christian missionary to the Arab Muslims of Algeria & founder of what is now known as Arab World Ministries

The Final Years of Helen Lemmel

Those who knew Helen in her later years tell of her joy and enthusiasm. Though living on government welfare in a sparse bedroom, whenever asked how she was doing, she would reply, 'I'm doing well in the things that count.'

Helen was always composing hymns but she had no way of writing them down so she would call friends at all hours and get them to record her lyrics before she forgot them.

Helen had a small plastic keyboard by her bed. There she would play, sing and cry. "One day God is going to bless me with a great heavenly keyboard," she'd say. "I can hardly wait!"

Helen died on November 1, 1961, in Seattle, Washington, almost 98 years of age.

<http://chrisfieldblog.com/2008/11/14/blind-helen-howarth-lemmel-turns-our-eyes>

Heavenly Mindedness

"The mind becomes insensitive to heavenly desire through its preoccupation with early cares. When its preoccupation with the actions of the world hardens it, it cannot be softened for the things that pertain to God's love."

(Gregory "Homily 19" on the Gospels)

"Just as impure love inflames the soul, and draws it toward earthly things that are desirable but are bound to die, and casts it down into the depths; so holy love raises the soul to heavenly things, and causes the soul to burn for eternal things, and stirs the soul toward that which will neither pass away nor die, and lifts it from the depths of hell to heaven"

Augustine

"Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither"

C S Lewis, Mere Christianity

"Drown the thoughts of your present misery in those precious depths of eternity. Behold so much in heaven that it might infinitely console and make up for all your losses here."

Andrew Gray

Set Your Mind on Things Above
How to Live Heavenly Minded
Scott Hubbard

Set aside, for a moment, the day's pressing tasks. Hush, if you can, the hopes and desires that rushed upon you the moment you awoke. Step away from the morning's burdens. Forget what the hours ahead may hold.

Now, Christian, remember: You are going to heaven. Very soon, even any moment, you will be hastened away from all you've known here to take an eternal holiday. You will wake up to find your lungs filled with the air of "a better country" (Hebrews 11:16). Your sorrows and sighs will be out of sight (Isaiah 51:11). You will see Jesus face-to-face (Philippians 1:23). And with him you will be home (2 Corinthians 5:8).

"Our minds are most full of heaven when they are most full of Christ."

And now imagine what life might be like if, as we step back into the day's tasks, desires, and burdens, we kept one eye upward. How might today be different if we brought the hope of heaven into the stuff of earth — if thoughts of things above adorned our waking hours?

We might then discover how much of our happiness rests on heavenly mindedness. And we might strive to have it said of us, as it was said of a saint of old...

Of that good man let this high praise be given,
Heaven was in him before he was in heaven.

Set Your Mind on Things Above

We would do well to listen again to the clearest charter of heavenly mindedness in Scripture:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

What does it mean to be heavenly minded? Not merely to live *then* and *there*, but to live *now* in light of *then*, *here* in light of *there*.

Roots in Heavenly Soil

If you belong to Christ, then in the truest sense, you do not live *here* on earth, but *there* in heaven: “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). Nor is your life in Christ on full display *now*, but only *then*: “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:4).

Your life is wonderfully, inextricably, eternally bound up with Jesus himself, who reigns *there* and will appear *then*. And heavenly mindedness aligns us with that fact, teaching us to define our identity not by the person we see in the mirror but by the Savior we see in Scripture.

Yet such a mindset does not nullify the life we have on earth, but rather transforms it according to the culture and norms of heaven. If we are hidden with Christ *there* and will be revealed *then*, we cannot help but look more like Christ *here* and *now*. Paul develops this point through the rest of the chapter, where he pens a portrait of the heavenly minded:

- They put to death all that dishonors God and demeans others (Colossians 3:5–9).
- They dress themselves in the heavenly clothing of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (Colossians 3:12).
- In a society of accusations and recriminations, they speak the otherworldly language of forgiveness (Colossians 3:13).
- They walk under the reign of divine peace, which has established its throne on their hearts (Colossians 3:15).
- They speak and sing with the harmony of gratitude and grace (Colossians 3:15–17; 4:6).
- In every relationship, in every word, in every deed, they seek to show the glory of Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17–4:1).

They are like oaks whose roots sink deep into heavenly soil. Though they grow up in the same field as the rest of the world, and though the same winds and storms beat against their trunks, they daily draw nourishment from another world, and so bear the fruit of that better country.

Heavenly Habits

How then can we grow in heavenly mindedness? How can people like us — everyday saints with jobs and families and friends and neighbors and a host of

earthly responsibilities — come to have it said of us, “Heaven was in him before he was in heaven”?

The first answer is familiar: give ourselves to Bible reading and prayer, to corporate worship and fellowship, each of which is a means of heavenly mindedness as much as it is a means of grace. But alongside the daily habits of Scripture and prayer, and the weekly habits of corporate worship and fellowship, we can also position ourselves more intentionally to set our minds on things that are above.

Begin your day in heaven.

Robert Murray McCheyne, a heavenly minded man if there ever were one, once described his morning devotions as a means of “giving the eye the habit of looking upward all the day” (*Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray McCheyne*, 64). Knowing his thoughts would not drift toward heaven in the afternoon or evening unless he fixed his mind there first thing, he began his day in heaven.

We might learn the same lesson from the Lord’s Prayer. In teaching us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11), did not Jesus assume we would normally begin the day on our knees? And significantly, before that prayer leads us to ask for daily bread, it sets our minds on things above:

Our Father *in heaven*,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is *in heaven*. (Matthew 6:9–10)

If we take the Lord’s Prayer as our model, then heaven will fill some of our first thoughts every morning. *Here* and *now* will fade, at least for a few moments, before the brilliance of *there* and *then*. And when we walk into our day, we may take something of heaven with us.

Set your mind through meditation

The command to “set your minds on things that are above” means more than “read about things that are above.” Something beyond mere reading is needed — a practice the biblical writers call *meditation* (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1–2; 119:97). If typical Bible reading focuses on paragraphs and chapters, meditation focuses on sentences and words; if in Bible reading we walk down the hallway of a passage, in meditation we open doors and explore rooms. The meditative Bible reader may, for example, read all of Colossians 3 in four or five minutes, but then

come back to spend as much time (or more) pondering the wonder of what it means to be “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). Meditation takes us above the foothills and puts us on the peaks of God’s revelation. And like Moses, we may come down still shining with the glory we’ve seen.

Maybe serious meditation feels like moving mountains to you. If so, start small, and don’t lose heart. Our minds, like a muscle, grow stronger through exercise. And by God’s grace, what feels impossible now may feel almost natural six months from now.

Retreat to things above throughout the day.

We saw above that Robert Murray McCheyne aimed to cultivate “the habit of looking upward all the day.” Many of us share a similar ambition — at least in theory. Reality might tell a different story.

If you’re at all like me, you leave your morning devotions with a sincere desire to go on thinking of things above in the spare moments of your day. But then you regularly fill every spare moment with something else. In the car, you turn on the news. In line at the store, you check your email. Waiting for a friend, you play a game on your phone. Lying in bed, you scroll through social media. None of these activities is necessarily bad. But how often are they the reflex of a mind addicted to distraction? And what if we resolved to spend at least *some* of the day’s silences recalling what we read that morning, rehearsing a memorized passage, or praying to our Father in heaven?

Moses told Israel to turn to God’s word “when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 6:7). If we too claimed more spare moments for the things that are above, we might be surprised at the unusual strength, peace, and joy that would be ours.

Treasure the heart of heaven.

Heaven is and always will be a world of glory (Colossians 3:4). When God makes all things new, the canyons and mountains, the galaxies and grasslands of this fallen world will groan no more (Romans 8:21). These broken bodies will be clothed with immortality (1 Corinthians 15:54). Human society will share in the very harmony of the Trinity (John 17:22–24).

Nevertheless, the hub of all that glory, whose name will rest upon our foreheads, and whose brightness will light up the world, will be God himself in Christ. “When *Christ* who is your life appears, then you also will appear *with him* in

glory” (Colossians 3:4). Heaven without Christ is like the ocean without water, the sky without air, fire without flame. He is heaven’s beating heart.

What does this mean for our heavenly mindedness? It means that our minds are most full of heaven when they are most full of Christ. As John Owen writes, “The whole glory of the state above is expressed by being ‘ever with the Lord, where he is, to behold his glory.’ . . . Our hope is that ere long we shall be ever with him; and if so, it is certainly our wisdom and duty to be here with him as much as we can” (*Works of John Owen*, 7:344).

Heavenly mindedness is an invitation to be with Jesus as much as we can, in preparation for the day when we will be with him always. So begin your day with Jesus, fix your meditations upon Jesus, and retreat throughout the day to Jesus. Because “set your minds on things that are above” means, at its core, “set your minds on *him*.”

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/set-your-mind-on-things-above>

“Heavenly-mindedness, and its antithesis, earthly-mindedness, simply doesn’t fit our times. It’s not so much that the contemporary Christian has embraced worldliness consciously, it’s more that we have been so influenced by a manner of viewing the world, that anything *beyond* this world seems obscured by an eclipse.”

(R.C. Sproul, in his foreword to Jeremiah Burroughs’ book, *A Treatise on Earthly-Mindedness*)

Yet, in the words of some of Burroughs’ contemporaries “there are yet in this declining, wanton, Christ-denying age, a generation upon the earth thus living, whose lives and graces, though hidden under a mean outside, under many reproaches and infirmities, yet shine inwardly with the glory of Christ upon them; who, though they are in the world, yet follow the Lord with a different spirit than the spirit of the world.”

(From Burroughs’ *Treatise on Earthly-Mindedness*)

“Heavenly-mindedness render us pilgrims. All of life is lived under heaven with heaven in view. We are traveling. We are traveling to eternity, to heaven. We are focused on heaven as our “true home”...they have the luster of heaven shining wherever they go and in all company.”

(Maareten Kuivenhoven, citing Burroughs’ *Treatise on Earthly-Mindedness*)