

Her Story Silhouette by Shari House

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Silhouette:

Anne Steele was born in 1717* in Hampshire, England. Her family were among the earliest Baptists in Hampshire, and they played an active role in the Boughton Baptist Chapel. Her father was a timber merchant and for over 50 years, filled the role of lay pastor in the church. Anne had an older brother and a younger brother, and when she was just three years of age, her mother passed away. As a young child, Anne received a good education and showed great interest in literature. She began writing poems and enjoyed entertaining her friends and family with them.

In Anne's early teen years, her health began to fail. She suffered from chronic malaria, painful stomach problems and severe teeth pain. At the age of 19 she was thrown from a horse and sustained a hip injury that caused her much trouble, and she lived with persistent headaches. Despite these ailments, she maintained a joyful spirit. As Anne grew older her writings took on a more spiritual tone. Her hymns and poems came from her intensely personal relationship with the Lord and her personal experiences and, as such, often carried deep spiritual truths and real emotions that struck a chord with anyone who read her lyrics.

Anne never married and remained in her father's home along with her stepmother. For many years she spent her time assisting her father with his pastoral duties and focusing on her writing. Those in her small circle of family and friends, who heard her hymns, were affected by her writing and desired that she would share her talents with the public. Anne was quite reluctant. In fact, she refused to publicize any of her work until 1760, when she was in her early forties. She finally agreed to have some of her hymns published but wanted no recognition and so submitted her work under the pen name Theodosia and gave away any profits she made to charity. That year two volumes were published titled "Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional."

With Anne's hymns available for public consumption, Baptist churches around England began to use them in their hymnals. She is often called the "Mother of English Hymn" and is listed with the likes of Charles Wesley, John Newton, and William Cowper. After her death, a third volume of her works was published. In total the three volumes include 144 hymns, 35 to 40 psalms in verse, and over 30 poems and prose writings. Her hymns eventually made their way to America, and when Trinity Church in Boston, Massachusetts published its hymnal in 1808, 59 of its 144 hymns were penned by Anne. One of her most famous hymns, "When I Survey Life's Varied Scenes" is said to have been written after the untimely death of a suitor when she was but 21 years of age. This hymn that turns earthly loss into a spirit of thankfulness has been published in over 800 hymnals since 1792.

When Anne was 43 years old, her stepmother passed away. She suffered further loss when her sister-in-law died a few years after that. Anne's father was left in her care until his death in 1769. For the last nine years of Anne's life she

was bedridden, but despite this, she kept her bright and cheerful spirit. Her friends aptly described her as a woman of "unaffected humility, warm benevolence, sincere friendship, and genuine devotion."

Anne died on November 11, 1778 at the age of 61*. Her feeble body was ready to be freed from its life of pain, and she was ready to meet her Saviour. With her friends gathered around her weeping, she closed her eyes serenely and with her dying breath said, "I know my Redeemer liveth," and with that she entered Heaven's gates. Anne lived her whole life in the same village, and yet her life's work reached around the globe. It has been said, "the hymn writing that began in the privacy of her personal devotions found its way to the pews of England and America." She is truly a woman of whom it could be said, "**She hath done what she could**"!

Her Story/My Story:

Anne is named as England's first woman hymnwriter and is often portrayed as a woman who endured a life of disappointment. It has been assumed that with the pain and suffering she endured and the fact that she never married, she was a lonely, melancholy invalid, but nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, recent research shows she lived a much more social life than was originally thought. She had numerous suitors over the years and a number of proposals, including one from the well-known minister-hymnist Benjamin Beddome. She, instead, chose to stay single, believing it would provide her a greater opportunity to serve the Lord. Truthfully she did spend much time in bed with her different sicknesses, and her songs do have a pensive air about them, but the thoughts written down in song always lead the reader to know that her hope and trust was in God and that she was in awe of her Heavenly Father and His love and care toward her. She wrote often about the freedom you have because of God's grace. Here are a few stanzas to Anne's song "Weary Souls Invited to Rest," that speak to this matter:

Come weary souls with sin distressed,
The Saviour offers heav'nly rest;
The kind, the gracious call obey,
And cast your gloomy fears away.

Oppressed with guilt, a painful load,
O come, and spread your woes abroad;
Divine compassion, mighty love,
Will all the painful load remove.

Here mercy's boundless ocean flows,
To cleanse your guilt and heal your woes;
Pardon, and life, and endless peace –
How rich the gift! How free the grace!

I'm not a songwriter, per se, but every now and then when meditating on the Lord or reading the Bible, a small phrase or even just a word, that is so strong and powerful and touches my heart so profoundly, will send me into deep thought. And sometimes, those thoughts spill out in song. One of the songs I wrote several years ago while studying Colossians 2:13-14 also speaks to this matter of being free from our sins because of the grace of God. I titled it "He Nailed Them to the Cross," and it goes like this:

Verse 1 - So many times I just can't seem to forget
The sins of my past and my deepest regrets.
And the devil comes to me in the night
Reminding of failures and things not done right.

Verse 2 - As a child of the King, I no longer have to live
Bound by the chains that sin always brings.
For when Jesus died on the cross for me,
He gave me the power of a life set free.

Chorus: And just when I think all hope is gone,
God reminds me all is not lost.
For Jesus took my sins with Him,
And He nailed them to the cross.
He nailed them to the cross.

Verse 3 - And that's where they'll be for eternity.
Oh, what a blessed thought!
I am no longer condemned to Hell.
Jesus took my sins,
And He nailed them to the cross.

Bible Study: Freedom in Surrender

For most of us "surrender" is one of the first words we encounter when becoming a Christian. We learn to surrender our humanistic self-worth and realize the depravity of our sinful nature when we stand before a holy God. We learn to surrender our own "I am a god unto myself" mentality when we put our trust in the One True God. We learn to surrender our schedule and start making time for a personal walk with the Lord and attending church. We learn to surrender what we've been taught or what society has told us is allowed, and we seek to follow God's laws given in the Bible. We learn to surrender our life's plan or goals and begin seeking God's will for our life. At every turn in the Christian life there is this matter of "surrender."

Surrender is a word that missionaries are quite familiar with and are usually pretty good at. I mean, after all, they have not only surrendered to serve the Lord full-time in the ministry, they've surrendered to do it far away from all that is familiar. They have surrendered to spending holidays away from loved ones, surrendered to following their husband's or, in my case, their team leader's ministry plans, surrendered to homeschooling their children, surrendered to their children having just a few friends if any, surrendered to most everything they do being called into question or wonderment as it doesn't match the mindset of those around them, surrendered to so many things. For me, I find being a missionary in Thailand brings its own set of surrenders . . . surrendering to minimal communication with the people you want to reach until you can master the language (which could and does take years), surrendering the enjoyment of late night summer picnics since it gets depressingly dark by 6:00 p.m. year round and there are fire ants and cockroaches in the grass anyway, surrendering to driving freely in your own lane without fear of getting hit or having your lane somehow just disappear (I mean really, how does that even happen, but it always seems to), surrendering to wearing a size XL when you normally would wear a size M in the States . . . and Heaven help any missionary lady who is larger than a US size M, surrendering to . . . you get the idea. Whatever situation you find yourself in, I'm sure you would have your own list of things you have "surrendered" to the Lord in order to fulfill His will for your life.

Many mature Christians have accomplished the surrendering of their will, their plans, and even their human nature. Some might even consider themselves fully surrendered to the Lord. Several years ago, while doing a study on "surrender" and feeling I had a pretty good handle on the matter, the Lord showed me an area where I had yet to surrender. It is an area not often associated with this matter of "surrender," but I believe that it is just as important if we are to live a life characterized by freedom . . . a life that God intends for all His children to live. It was the surrendering of my past sins that God had already forgiven.

The word "surrender" doesn't actually show up in the King James Version of the Bible, but the principle of "surrender" abounds throughout the Word. In my study I found many examples of commands to surrender, ways to surrender, the results of surrendering, and of course, examples of people who surrendered. Here are just a few:

- Isaiah surrendered his plans and his time.
- Moses surrendered his inabilities.
- Joseph surrendered to injustices.
- Samuel surrendered to a life of service.
- David surrendered to consequences from his actions.
- Ezekiel surrendered to a "goldfish bowl" lifestyle.
- Hosea surrendered to a life of heartbreak.
- Mary surrendered to shame.
- Ananias surrendered to obedience even when he doubted.
- Paul surrendered to a single life . . . and on and on it goes.

And of course, our greatest example in anything is the Lord Jesus Himself. He surrendered His glory, His position, His life, and so much more.

At the time of my study, I was allowing myself to get discouraged over things the Lord had already forgiven and forgotten. It was a new concept to me to look at the discouragement I felt as an area I hadn't surrendered to the Lord. To "surrender" doesn't just mean "giving in" to future things the Lord has for your life . . . it also means "letting go" of anything in the past that discourages you and keeps you from serving the Lord freely today.

I think this is the one area that the devil trips me up the most. The trick of "not feeling up to the task at hand" for being a missionary lady/wife/mother/pastor's wife/teacher/etc. doesn't work well with me. Don't get me wrong. I do have feelings of inadequacy, incapability, unpreparedness, and unwillingness at times, but for the most part, my inherited "can do" attitude . . . or maybe it is the rebellious streak that lies just under my skin . . . keeps me from giving in to the devil when he tries to use this trick on me. However, he always seems to be able to get me with this matter of remembering all my past failures and shortcomings and causes me to become discouraged because of them.

In my study on "surrender" I came across [Colossians 2:13-14](#) which says, "[And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;](#)"

I'm a visual person and although it pains me to envision Christ hanging on the cross with the nails in His hands, it is unbelievably freeing to think of my sins being nailed there too. That selfless act on His part frees me. I am not bound to my past sin, nor am I bound by my past sin. My sins are bound by the nails in the cross. I don't need to rehash them. I don't need to ask forgiveness for them again. I don't have to be weighted down in shame because of them. God doesn't hold them against me. They are forgotten. All my failures and shortcomings in the past are irrelevant to today. They are not current in my life. They are "taken out of the way." I am free from them. Satan can only use them against me if I take them back off the cross and try to bear their burden by myself again. The love that was strong enough to hold my Savior to His cross is strong enough to keep my sins nailed there with Him. As I meditated on these verses and my heart filled with the wonder of the freedom they bring, I wrote the song "He Nailed Them to the Cross."

I hope today you are not weighted down by your past. I hope it does not keep you from serving the Lord freely. But if you struggle in this area sometimes as I do, I hope that you will be encouraged today to surrender it to the Lord and bask in the freedom that the nails and the cross give you.