

“How great a debtor”

There are many hymns that I love, and I am hard pressed to give an answer when asked for my favorite. There is one, though, that seems always to be near the top, and it is *Come, thou fount*. The words contain such beautiful imagery. The tune, an American folk melody, is lilting and graceful, and carries the words perfectly. But the main reason I love this hymn so well is the line that begins the third verse:

“Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be.”

I have to confess that I sang this hymn for many many years without understanding this line. Perhaps the writer, Robert Robinson, felt he needed to phrase his thoughts to fit the meter. Whatever the case, it wasn't until I took it upon myself to re-arrange the words that this sentence started to make sense:

“Oh, how great a debtor to grace I'm daily constrained to be.”

Even that doesn't quite do it. Here's what it says to me:

“Every day, I am compelled to acknowledge the huge debt of gratitude I owe to God's grace.”

One of my favorite spiritual writers, Anne Lamott, says that prayer can be distilled into “thank you, thank you, thank you,” “help me, help me, help me,” and “WOW!” For me, that line is a “thank you, thank you, thank you” prayer. Sometimes it's in my mind when I wake up, or it sneaks in during the day, and the next thing I know, I'm humming. But unlike the common earworm, that tune that plays in your head unbidden and unwelcome, “Oh, to grace how great a debtor” is like a mantra of thanks.

Praise be to God.

