



HYMNS

WE LOVE

LEADER'S GUIDE



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Pippa Cramer serves on staff at Holy Trinity Claygate, Surrey, UK, with responsibility for ministry to seniors, and in 2022 was awarded an MBE in recognition of her work with older and vulnerable people. Pippa is the founder of Connections—one of the largest church-based gatherings for seniors in the UK—and she is passionate about loving and caring for older people, reducing loneliness and giving seniors the opportunity to find hope in the gospel. Pippa is a qualified occupational therapist, having specialised in the support and care of older people; she is an Ambassador for Faith in Later Life; and in 2021 she was awarded the Alphege Award for Evangelism and Witness by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby.



Steve Cramer first came across Christians aged 14 through a local church youth group, and, ever since, his faith and love for Jesus have continued to grow. Having spent a number of years working in relief and development in Africa, Steve is now a director of two growing businesses in hospitality and social media. A regular speaker and preacher, Steve loves helping people to encounter God with both their hearts and minds. His other loves include Pippa, their two children, and their two dogs and one cat.

Welcome

Dear friend,

Thank you so much for your interest in *Hymns We Love*! This resource grew out of my work with seniors at my church in south-east England, where I have served in pastoral care and among seniors for more than ten years. We now have one of the largest church-based groups for seniors in the UK, called Connections, with over 100 attending each week.

A few years ago, we began to think about how we could be more intentional in sharing the gospel with these precious older friends. We had found that seniors were hesitant to join evangelistic courses: “What if I can’t keep up?” “Will there be a test at the end?” “I went to Sunday school, so why do I need a course?” So, after a *lot* of prayer, we had the idea of using traditional hymns as a welcoming and non-threatening way to explain truths about the Christian faith, at a pace designed specifically for seniors.

Hymns are known to and enjoyed by this generation. They resonate with a lifetime of memories, even for those suffering from increasing short-term memory loss. We developed a series of talks exploring the history and lyrics of some of these favourite hymns and called it *Hymns We Love*. We have since used the material extensively in our own church, and it’s proved extremely popular. It has also been tried and tested elsewhere, and was the cornerstone of the Daily Hope phone line, which received 750,000 calls during the Covid-19 pandemic. We are therefore now delighted to make it widely available for you.

Older people are the fastest-growing age demographic in Western societies. There are 12 million over-65s in the UK—some 19% of the population—and that figure is set to rise in the years ahead. In the US, older adults are expected to outnumber children by 2034. Jesus calls his people to love our neighbours, whoever they are—and the reality is that an increasing number of our neighbours are likely to be seniors.

Not only so, but many of these older people have a real need for community and connection. In recent decades, seniors have become among the most isolated in our communities. Society has changed and is changing rapidly, with many

seniors feeling left behind and bewildered. Changing family structures mean that more older people than ever are living alone. And although people are living longer, sadly this also means that many are suffering more profoundly with physical illness, loneliness and isolation, dementia and mental-health struggles.

Churches have a wonderful opportunity to share God's love with this precious generation. Our vision for *Hymns We Love* is:

“For hundreds of thousands of older people to be given the opportunity to hear the gospel, and to discover how amazing our wonderful God is and how much he loves them.”

This will only happen as local churches and Christians take up the call to love and care for this sadly often-neglected generation. Thank you so much for your willingness to be part of that mission. The need is real, the opportunities are tremendous, and for our older friends, time may be short.

Please know that we are praying for you, and we'd love to encourage you to start with prayer too. We're excited to see what God might do for this precious older generation in answer to the prayers of his people.

Yours,

Pippa Cramer

Section 1

ABOUT



HYMNS

WE LOVE

HYMNS WE LOVE

WEEK	HYMN	KEY THEME
1	How Great Thou Art	God is the powerful, holy Creator of the universe, who longs for relationship with us.
2	Rock of Ages	Jesus was a real person, God's Son, who died to bridge the gap between us and God.
3	Amazing Grace	God's lavish grace invites us into full relationship with him, through Jesus.
4	The Lord's My Shepherd	When we follow God as our Shepherd, he promises to journey with us through life and lead us home to heaven.
5	And Can It Be?	We can have confidence in our relationship with God because it's based on what he has done and his goodness, not on what we have done and our goodness.
Christmas	Hark! The Herald Angels Sing	Jesus came into the world at Christmas to give us comfort and hope.
Easter	Thine Be the Glory	Jesus rose from death at Easter and invites us to trust him with our fears and doubts.
Any time	My Song Is Love Unknown	Jesus' death was part of God's loving plan to restore our relationship with him.

Series overview

Hymns We Love is an evangelistic series designed to introduce seniors to the good news of the gospel.

Each session explores a different aspect of the Christian faith through a familiar, well-loved hymn. At the heart of each session is a 30-minute video, which brings together music, testimony and prayer, along with a short talk which tells the story behind the hymn, and explores the meaning of the words and the Bible truths on which it is based. Week by week, the series aims to take guests on a faith journey from understanding who God is to making a personal commitment to him.

The main series comprises five sessions. There are also three additional introductory sessions, which can be used at Christmas and Easter, or as a one-off at any time of year.

The content of each video follows the same pattern:

- Welcome and introduction.
- Short interview with an older person, sharing why this session's hymn is special to them.
- The hymn, sung by our *Hymns We Love* congregation.
- A talk, reflecting on the story behind the hymn, the meaning of the words, and Bible truths to which they point.
- The hymn again, encouraging guests to reflect on the words.
- Closing prayer.

Structure of a session

How you use *Hymns We Love* will depend on your context. It can be used for larger groups in a church, church hall or community building, or in smaller groups or one to one in people's homes. It could also be adapted, shortened or simplified to use in care/retirement homes and with people with dementia.

If you already run a group for seniors at your church, you could include *Hymns We Love* as part of your regular sessions; or you could run it as a special series of events. You might choose to run your *Hymns We Love* sessions weekly or monthly—whatever you think will work best for your guests.

The structure of a session is very simple.

- Guests have time to chat over refreshments as they arrive.
- They watch the video together (or, you may choose to deliver this material “live” in person).
- There's then an opportunity to consider some discussion questions in small groups—followed by an opportunity for more refreshments!

The session is designed to be gentle and relational.

Here's how that might look for a session that begins at 10am:

- 9 am: Team arrive to set up the room, prepare refreshments and ensure the technology is working.
- 9.30 am: Team meet to pray and give information about what is happening.
- 10 am: Guests arrive. The welcome team greet and welcome guests, and give them a *Hymns We Love* Songbook. Coffee and refreshments are served. Team members are also on hand to chat to anyone who may be alone.
- 10.20 am: Leader gets people's attention and welcomes everyone, and gives an introduction to what is going to happen. It's very

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important at this point to ensure that all guests can see and hear adequately.

- 10.30 am: Start *Hymns We Love* video session. Each video includes an introduction, a testimony interview, watching/singing a rendition of the hymn, a short talk, listening to/singing the hymn again, and a concluding prayer.
- 11 am: Leader ends the *Hymns We Love* video and thanks everyone for coming along. He/she can suggest at this point that in small groups they discuss/chat through the suggested questions in the Songbook. Again, it is important to have at least one team member in each group to gently facilitate these discussions.
- 11.30 am: Guests leave and team clear away. Team feedback is useful at this point too.

If you prefer, you can also run *Hymns We Love* without the video episodes, by having the hymns played and sung live and talks and testimonies delivered in person, and by using the prayers and discussion questions from the Guest Songbook. The talk transcripts are included in Section 4 of this Leader's Guide to help you prepare.

Atmosphere of a session

Just as important as **what** is done is **how** the session feels. The overriding atmosphere of a *Hymns We Love* session should be one of **love and care**. This **relational approach to evangelism** seems to be particularly effective with our older friends. Many do not have as many relationships as perhaps they once had, so the friendship and care you extend is especially significant. Therefore, while the content of the videos is an important part of a *Hymns We Love* session, so much of the vital work will be in person, as you love and care for your guests.

The goal is to help our older friends experience the love of God through the relationships they have with his people. Helping people feel loved and valued, ensuring that they are comfortable, building friendships, and allowing people

to feel like they belong in a community are all so important. As we do these things, relationships and trust are built up over time which, in my experience, makes it easier for people to hear and receive the message of the gospel.

A number of elements are important in creating an atmosphere of love and care:

1. **Welcome.** It's vital to appreciate that coming along to any kind of new group, let alone a church group, can be really daunting. It is especially so for older people, who might live alone and not feel as confident with socialising as maybe they once were. So do everything you can to show people that they matter and that you're glad they're there, right from the moment they arrive. Many may be isolated, lonely or bereaved—so the welcome and friendship they receive as they come in is vital in helping them relax and feel at ease.
2. **Listening.** The *Hymns We Love* format allows lots of time for conversations. As you chat to guests, ask gentle questions that give people the opportunity to share—and listen to their answers! Follow up next time you meet if you can; someone remembering your recent operation, or the anniversary of your husband dying, or even your birthday means so much and demonstrates that you matter and are valued. Consider checking in with your guests between sessions, perhaps by way of a phone call. In this way, trust begins to build over time.
3. **Generosity.** From the refreshments served (if possible, for free) to the gentle support from the team, the idea is to share God's generosity, demonstrating in word *and* deed the grace we have found in Jesus—far more than we deserve.
4. **Prayer.** Prayer needs to surround and underpin every session and is absolutely vital if we want the Lord to be touching lives and bringing people to him. So I would encourage you to pray as a team before and after each session, pray for your guests throughout the rest of the week, and do be praying in your own heart during the session itself!

Love and care is infectious—it's catching! I have found that as we seek to make those around us feel loved and cared for, valued and appreciated, they will go on to share this with others around them too, giving *Hymns We Love* a distinctly different atmosphere from other community groups that seniors might go to.

What you'll need

To run *Hymns We Love* you will need...

- a *Hymns We Love* DVD or downloadable episodes (if using).
- a Leader's Guide for each team member.
- a Guest Songbook for each guest. This contains the words for each hymn, a summary of the talk, a copy of the prayer, and discussion questions. The Songbook is intended to be a beautiful gift for guests and something to take home to help them to remember and reflect on what they've heard.
- pens to allow people to jot down notes or questions, if they'd like to.

There are also promotional materials available to help you advertise your series. You can buy invitation postcards from The Good Book Company or download them for free to print at home. We've also created a short video trailer that you can show in church services or at community groups to encourage people to come. Go to www.thegoodbook.co.uk/hwl.

Using the seasonal specials

The main *Hymns We Love* series consists of five sessions. There are also three additional stand-alone sessions: one for Christmas, one for Easter, and one that can be used at any time of year. You can use these episodes as the basis of a one-off special event, before inviting guests to join you for the full *Hymns We Love* series afterwards.

For example, you could use the Christmas session as part of a festive event, combined with Christmas crafts and mince pies, or even a Christmas lunch. Or for Easter, you could put on a spring-themed tea, decorating your space with lots of daffodils or other spring flowers. And you could use the “My Song is Love Unknown” introductory session in any number of ways: for example, as part of a special lunch, cream tea, summer event, or Remembrance/Veterans Day events.

Some people may be more likely to accept the invitation to a one-off event rather than a longer series, especially if they’re unsure of what’s involved—but hopefully, once they’ve come once and enjoyed themselves, they’ll be keen to join you for more!

At the end of the video for each of these stand-alone sessions, there is an invitation to the full *Hymns We Love* series. If you do not intend to run the full *Hymns We Love* series in the near future, you can stop the video before this point.

You can download the relevant Guest Songbook pages for each of the seasonal sessions for free from The Good Book Company website, and print as many as you need (rather than providing every guest with a Songbook for a one-off event). Visit www.thegoodbook.co.uk/hwl.

Adapting *Hymns We Love* for other contexts

With a little adaptation and creativity, the *Hymns We Love* material could be used with seniors in many different settings. For example:

- **Care-home settings:** Many churches have good links with local care homes/retirement homes and have volunteers who regularly visit residents and/or run services for them. You could use *Hymns We Love* (with or without the videos) in this setting.
- **For those with memory impairment:** Often even those with advanced memory loss are able to recognise and enjoy old hymns they heard when they were younger. I’ve delivered a shortened

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version of the *Hymns We Love* material (the hymn, a short two-minute thought, and a prayer) in nursing homes for those with dementia and Alzheimer's. This takes some adaptation but is well worth it.

- **Pastoral visiting:** Your church may have a small team of volunteers or lay workers who already visit elderly and housebound people within your church's orbit; or this may be part of your or your minister's regular pattern of ministry. You could bring the DVD and watch a *Hymns We Love* video with people in their homes when you visit, as a way to offer encouragement and open up conversations. You may want to choose a session which feels particularly relevant for their situation (for example, "The Lord's My Shepherd" during a time of bereavement or ill-health), and leave the DVD with them so that they can watch more on their own.
- **Small groups/home groups:** *Hymns We Love* could easily be enjoyed in small-group settings, if a large enough television screen is available and the home is suitably accessible
- **"Holiday at home":** A "holiday at home" is an event run over a day or several days which gives seniors the fun of a holiday/vacation, while ensuring they are still able to sleep in their own beds each night! It usually offers various activities, time to eat together, and some sort of spiritual input, often around a theme (a little like a Holiday Bible Club or Vacation Bible School, but for seniors). You could use the *Hymns We Love* sessions as the spiritual programme for an event like this (perhaps with a musical or historical theme).
- **Community groups:** The *Hymns We Love* DVD could be shown in any number of community groups for seniors (e.g. friendship clubs, "Knit and Natter" groups, luncheon clubs). You could give a copy to each of your older church members and encourage them to show it at whatever groups and clubs they are involved in, or simply to share it with their circle of friends.

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Whatever points of contact you and your church have with older people, my hope and prayer is that *Hymns We Love* will provide fresh opportunities to share the love of Jesus with seniors in your community.