

King James Bible Study Correspondence Course

An Outreach of Highway Evangelistic Ministries
5311 Windridge lane ~ Lockhart, Florida 32810 ~ USA

Women Heroes of the Faith Lesson 2 A Francis Jane Crosby

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Born: March 24, 1820 South East, New York
Died: February 12, 1915 Bridgeport, Connecticut
Life span: 94 years, 10 months, 19 days

Francis Jane Crosby was born in a one-story cottage, her father John was never to be remembered by Francis for he died in when she was 1 year old. When Francis was six weeks old, she caught a slight cold in her eyes. The family physician was away. Another country doctor was called in to treat her. He prescribed hot mustard poultices to be applied to her eyes, which destroyed her sight completely. It was later learned that the man was not qualified to practice medicine, he left town and was never heard of again. Francis never felt any resentment against him, she believed it was permitted by the Lord to fulfill His plan for her life.

Her wise mother Mercy Crosby set about immediately to prepare her daughter for a happy life, in spite of this great handicap.

When but five years old, she was taken by her mother to consult the best eye specialist in the country, Dr. Valentine Mott. Neighbors and friends collected money together in order to send her. The dreaded answer came, "Poor child, I am afraid you will never see again." Francis did not think she was poor. It was not the loss of sight that bothered her young heart. It was the thought that she would never be able to get an education like other boys and girls. Surprisingly, at the age of eight, she wrote her first recorded poetry: "**0 what a happy soul am I! Although I cannot see, I am resolved that in this world, contended I will be. Bow many blessings I enjoy, that other people don't. To weep and sigh because I'm blind, I cannot and I won't!**"

Around nine years of age, the family moved to Ridgefield, Connecticut, where she was to stay until 15. Her Mother was kind, but busy making a living for both of them, so it was Grandmother who became an unforgettable influence in her life. Grandmother spent many hours describing the things of nature to her. Also, she introduced Francis to the Bible and this book now became more familiar to her than any other. She began to devour the scriptures. Sources have recorded that as a child she could repeat from memory the Pentateuch, the book of Ruth, many of the Psalms, the books of Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and much of the New Testament! This furnished the themes, inspiration, and diction for her imperishable gospel hymns.

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Two great blind poets of history, Homer and Milton, were to be joined by another great, Francis Jane Crosby, who published her first poem at the age of eleven. Near her 15th birthday came a happy announcement ... Her mother could send her to a new school, The Institution for the Blind in New York City. Francis clapped her hands joyfully crying, "O thank God, He has answered my prayer, just as I knew He would." It was on March 3, 1835, when Francis boarded a stage for Norwalk and then a boat for New York City. She was to spend the next 23 years of her life there, as a student for twelve years and then as a teacher for eleven years more.

From early childhood this sightless girl had felt the urge to write poetry and several short verses had come from her lips. At the institution her abilities began to assert themselves with renewed force.

Her teachers did not encourage her efforts but strangers did. William Cullen Bryant visited the school one day and gave her much encouragement, after chancing to read some of her verses. She said afterwards, "He will never know how much he did by those few words." Then one day, Dr. Combe of Boston, examined the heads of the blind students. As he felt her head, he exclaimed: "here is a poetess, give her every possible encouragement. Read the best books to her and teach her the finest that is in poetry. You will hear from this young lady someday."

This was the encouragement that she needed. Poetry began to flow from her heart and mind.

In the autumn of 1843, when she was 23, she was invited as a guest to the Congress of the United States of America. Endeavoring to secure an appropriation for the schools work with the blind, a group from the school was sent there. In her speech, Francis paid tribute to Congress and then began paying tribute to the Lord. She delivered a stirring oration, with no pathetic story but simply recited-some poems about the tender care of a loving Saviour. She spoke with conviction as though she had seen the Saviour face to face. The notable assembly addressed included such men as: John Quincy Adams, Thomas E. Benton, Hamilton Fish, Henry A. Wise, Alexander Stevens, Jefferson Davis, and Robert Toombs.

Before long, tears were glistening do the hearers cheeks, for whether great or small, thousands were changed as her messages became a healing balm for the soul.

As a result of this witness, she began to make friends with the great political and religious leaders of her time and no one could forget her once they met her. During her lifetime, she knew all the presidents except George Washington. President Van Buren dined with her and remained one of her warmest friends. She heralded the virtues of William Henry Harrison even though he served but one month. When President Tyler came to the

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Institution for the Blind, Francis welcomed him with an original poem. Her friendship with President Polk was close and inspiring. She enjoyed a close friendship with President Cleveland for more than half a century, for at one time he was the secretary of the Institution "For the Blind" while she taught; He took an unusual interest in her life and work and was often engaged in copying her poems.

Many visitors came to the school making memorable occasions for all. Once, Jenny Lind (Swedish opera singer) came. She sang and Francis Jane Crosby recited her poem called, "The Swedish Nightingale." When Henry Clay (United States Senator) visited the school, Miss Crosby was elected to recite a poem in his honor. When she had finished, Clay took her by the hand and said, "Six months ago, you sent me some poems of encouragement after the death of my dear son. For this and many of your other poems I am indebted to you." Standing there, the great statesman and the blind poet wept together. Young Clay was killed in a battle in Mexico.

At school her first book was published at age 24, was entitled ***The Blind Girl and Other Poems***. She also composed several popular songs and assisted in writing what was probably the first cantata published in America. At age 27, she became an instructor at the school, a position which she held until 1858, when she left.

With all of her apparent devotion to Christ, already shared in so many ways, it is hard to believe that she was not born again until 1851, at the age 31. This glorious beginning happened at a revival service held at the Old John Street Methodist Church in New York which she joined. Recalling the incident years later, she said:

"After a prayer was offered, they began to sing the grand old consecration hymn, ***"Alas! And Did My Saviour Bleed?"*** and when they reached the third line of the fifth stanza, ***"Here, Lord, I give myself away,"*** my very soul was flooded with celestial light."

Romance came into the life of Francis Jane Crosby, at the early age of 20 she fell in love with another blind student by the name of Alexander Van Alstyne. He was especially fond of music and was captivated by her poems. She, likewise, was fascinated by his sweet strains of music. Later, he was to write the music of some of her hymn-poems and, spend 44 years with her in marriage. One day in June he sang to his beloved, the music of his heart.

Alexander Van Alstyne also became a teacher and for over 15 years their friendship blossomed. Finally, on March 5, 1858, she was married at age 37.

Francis tells the story: "From that hour two lives looked on a new universe, for love met love; all the world was changed. We were no longer

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blind, for the light of love showed where the lilies bloomed, where the crystal waters found the moss-mantled spring."

Life was just beginning for Francis Jane Crosby, for her life's ministry was still ahead. The marriage was a happy one with Alexander Van Alstyne who lived until 1902. The couple had one child, only to be taken in death while yet a baby. Perhaps this incident helped inspire Fanny to write, *Safe In The Arms Of Jesus*, which was to comfort thousands of grief stricken parents suffering a similar fate.

Upon her marriage, she intended to use the name Mrs. Van Alstyne, but her husband insisted that she continue to use her maiden name, which was already quite famous.

Later, the couple united with the Thirtieth Street Methodist Church in New York. Fanny Crosby remained a lifelong Methodist. Through Peter Stryker, the minister of a Dutch Reformed Church in New York City, she met the well-known composer, William Bradbury. He gave her a most cordial welcome:

"Francis, Thank God that we have at last met, for you can write hymns, and I sought for a long time to have a talk with you. He suggested that she attempt a hymn for him that week. This was the opportunity that she was waiting for. In three days she returned submitting her first sacred song, the initial stanza of which reads:

We are going, we are going to a home beyond the skies, where the fields are robed in beauty, and the sunlight never dies.

In 1864 when Francis was 44, her course was set, this was her first hymn, used as a Sunday School hymn. Some stories of her most famous hymn-poems followed:

Pass Me Not was her first hymn to win world-wide attention. Acting upon the suggestion of her friend, William H. Doane (writer), Francis composed this in 1868 after a prison service. As she spoke to the prisoners, one cried out, ***"O Lord, don't pass me by!"*** She was so moved that she went home and wrote her famous plea. Ira David Sankey (American gospel singer and composer associated with Evangelist Dwight L. Moody) said, "No hymn was more popular at the meetings in London, in 1875, than ***"Pass me not of gentle Saviour."*** An Englishman drunkard heard the crowd singing it and whispered to himself, ***"Oh, I wish He would not pass me by."*** The next night the service began with the same hymn and he was saved. He began carrying a copy of the hymn with him every day, forty years later he became a successful businessman in America, he met Francis and gave her twenty dollars.

Most people know her by the name Fanny Crosby, she was blind. One day she said to her mother, "if I had a choice, I would still choose to remain

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blind ...for when at death; the first face I shall see will, be the face of my blessed Saviour."

Francis Jane Crosby, was the greatest hymn writer in the history of the Christian Church. Sources said she had over 8,000 poems that she wrote to music and there have been over 1 million copies of her hymns printed. One of her later hymns was "*And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story - Saved by grace.*" She had many pen names that she wrote hymns under, including Grace J. Frances, that were given to her by hymn book publishers so the public would not know she wrote so large a number of them. She produced as many as seven hymn-poems in one day. On several occasions, upon hearing an unfamiliar hymn sung, she would inquire about the author, and find it to be one of her own!

Here are just a few of the titles to songs we are familiar too.

- *A Shelter In The Time Of Storm*
- *All The Way My Saviour Leads Me*
- *Blessed Assurance*
- *Close To Thee*
- *He Hideth My Soul*
- *I Am Thine O Lord*
- *Jesus Is Calling*
- *My Saviour First Of All*
- *Near The Cross*
- *Pass Me Not*
- *Praise Him Praise Him*
- *Redeemed*
- *Rescue The Perishing*
- *Safe In The Arms Of Jesus*
- *Saved By Grace*
- *Saviour More Than Life To Me*
- *Speed Away*
- *Take The World But Give Me Jesus*
- *Tell Me The Story Of Jesus*
- *The Lights Of Home*
- *Thou Mighty To Save*
- *Tho' Your Sins Be As Scarlet*
- *Tis The Blessed Hour Of Prayer*
- *To God Be The Glory*
- *To The Work*
- *Will Jesus Find Us Watching*
- *Safe In The Arms Of Jesus* - was considered, to be her greatest hymn.

KJV**King James Bible Study Correspondence Course**

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Women Heroes of the Faith**Lesson 2 A****Francis Jane Crosby**

Name _____

1. What is your service to further the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
2. What president did she not meet in lifetime?
3. Who was Grace J. Francis?
4. How did Fanny become blind?
5. How did Fanny handle her disability?
6. How do you handle your disability?
7. Who introduced Fanny to the Bible?
8. How much Bible was Fanny able to memorize?
9. At what age was she invited to visit the United States Congress?, and why?

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10. What was the name of her first book?
11. How did she speak of her blindness?
12. How old was Fanny when she became born again?
13. What was Fanny's first worldwide hymn?
14. What inspired her to write the first worldwide hymn?

True/false

- Fanny was close friends with many of the United States Presidents.
- Alexander Van Alstyne was Fanny's husband.
- Fanny thanked God for being blind.



Scripture memorization, write out these verses on the back on this page:
(Read Revelation 3:14-16, 3:18-19) and write Revelation 3:17;
2 Corinthians 12:10; 2 Timothy 4:2 (Must be in KJV)

Any questions?