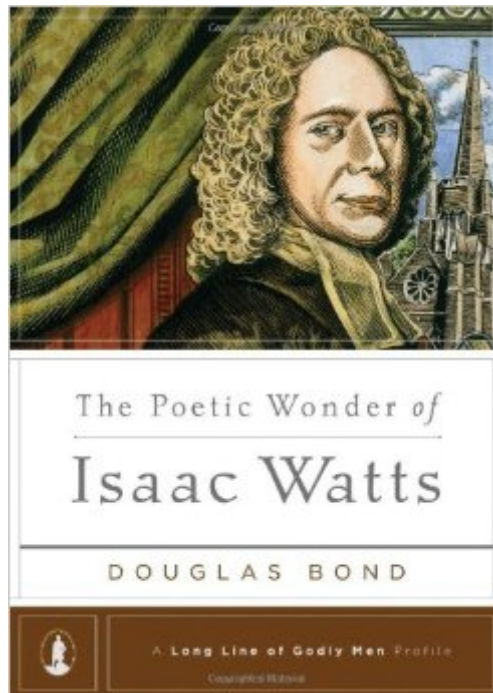


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The Poetic Wonder Of Isaac Watts (A Long Line Of Godly Men Profile)



Synopsis

Summary In an age of simplistic and repetitive choruses, many churches are rediscovering the blessing of theologically rich and biblically informed songs. In our A Long Line of Godly Men Profile series, Douglas Bond introduces us to Isaac Watts, "the father of English hymnody." Douglas Bond urges Christians to delight in the grandeur, beauty, and joy of Watts' poetry. We pray that you would regain a sense of God's majesty as we celebrate the God-given poetic wonder of Isaac Watts.

Chapters

Watts' Life and Legacy

Watts as Educator

Watts' Sermon Hymns

Watts as Lyric Poet

Watts as Hymn Writer

Watts as Poet Theologian

Watts as Children's Poet

Watts as Psalm Interpreter

Conclusion: Watts for Our Time

Resources and Tools

Part of A Long Line of Godly Men Profile series

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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a short book (163 pages), about average for the "Long Line of Godly Men Profiles" series. But in spite of its brevity, the book does a little bit of everything and is a very helpful new work on Isaac Watts. Equal parts biography, theological study, and poetry analysis, it's a great introduction to Watts, and a good hub of resources for further study.

Here's why this book is important. In a culture where entertainment and the tyranny of the newest fad really fight to drive our preferences, Bond calls us to reexamine the influence Watts' influence on congregational church music. Because our entertainment culture has affected the music churches choose to sing, and often not

for the better, remembering a hymn writer like Watts and the good he has done for the English-speaking church is very valuable. Bond says, "Our world clambers for the latest thing, and as we wear ourselves out in the process, great poets such as Watts often get put in a box on the curb for the thrift store pickup. How could a gawky, male poet, living and writing three hundred years ago, be relevant today? Our postmodern, post-Christian, post-biblical culture has almost totally dismissed what was called poetry in Watts' day. Few deny it: ours is a post-poetry culture" (xix). In one of the most rich and valuable parts of the book, Bond goes on in the preface to compare Watts, who held to poetic form and structure, to Walt Whitman, the father of "vers libre" or free-verse poetry. The contrast is compelling because Bond points out that Whitman abandoned form, which was part and parcel of making himself his life's object of worship; whereas Watts, writing poetry and hymns in rhythm and meter, sought to exalt Jesus Christ and make him look glorious. Underlying either the use of form, or the abandonment of it, is often a question of worship. And yet, Watts avoided "excess baggage of intricate form as well as of poetic adornment." His was a gospel objective first and last (xxiii). The pastoral purpose that often constrained Watts' overuse of "poetic adornment" is what makes his hymns so good for church song leaders and song writers to learn from today. He faithfully employed his creative gifting and skill for his people, taking Scripture and a robust biblical theology and writing a hymn a week for his church, as a vehicle for them to connect heart and imagination to their theology. Bond emphasizes, rightly so, that Watts wrote with a "gospel objective first and last" because he had a pastoral purpose in writing hymns. Watts did this faithfully, without hope of reaching beyond the congregation he pastored. But his hymns did reach beyond that context, and we bless God for it. Bond has clearly done his research to get to know Watts' life and work. He loves the poetry of this great hymn writer, and draws us into his own enjoyment of it. The book would be especially good to put in the hands of church musicians, music leaders, and songwriters. I hope church music and worship folk do get their hands on it and that it edifies and inspires.

Steven J. Lawson serves as the general editor of *A Long Line Of Godly Men Profiles*, published by Reformation Trust. Douglas Bond adds to this excellent series with a biographical sketch of Isaac Watts. The men set forth this series may disagree on secondary theological matters but "stood shoulder to shoulder" writes Lawson, "in championing these five biblical teachings (the five points of Calvinism) that magnify the sovereign grace of God in salvation. They upheld the truth that 'salvation is of the Lord.'" Isaac Watts is no exception. Watts was first and foremost a Bible-believing

Christian. Most recognize him as a poet, the author of at least 750 hymns. Mr. Bond nicely summarizes the Christ-honoring pen of Isaac Watts: "He was unapologetically a biblical and theological poet who has given to all Christians a rich legacy of sung worship, full of imagination, skill, deep theological perception, vivid sensory insight, cheerfulness in the midst of suffering and disadvantages, and a contagious sense of wonder at the majesty of God." Bond is quick to give God the glory as he guides readers through the life and journey of Isaac Watts. The book is a reminder of God's sovereign grace which serves as an impetus to worship and serve him with faithfulness and Christ-saturated joy.

The author is by no means neutral when it comes to his writing about Isaac Watts. While it was interesting to read how Watts' faith and experience shaped his writing, it seemed as though Mr. Bond doth cheer too much. I find many of Isaac Watts' hymns inspiring, but not all. It was an interesting, but a bit dry, read. I also got the feeling that the author felt it was his duty to come to the hymn writer's defense a little too often. I am glad I read it, though, as it gave me insight into Watt's hymnody.

I really liked this book. It gives a good background to what Isaac Watts is about. I've sung his hymns and have been moved by them, in fact some of his are my favorites. I was interested to learn that he loved to teach children logic. Something our schools have abandoned, because how can you tell children what to believe if they can logically think things through? I think this is a real downfall of this and recent generations of students. I want to read his book on logic sometime. I liked the humility of this man to bloom where he was planted. In spite of his hardships he never gave up his passion to serve the Lord.

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