

Every Time I Feel The Spirit Afro-American Spiritual UMC Hymnal #404

Adapted and arranged by William Farley Smith

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(Please note for this study, we will be using a more authentic version rather than the one found in the hymnal.)

If you'd like to hear the song: <https://youtu.be/iT9CyWdO-S4>

Refrain:

Every time I feel da Spirit movin' in my heart I will pray.

O every time I feel da Spirit movin' in my heart I will pray.

Up on the mountain my Lord spoke, out a His mouth came fire and smoke.

In the valley, on my knees, ask my Lord, mercy please.

Refrain:

Jordan River, chilly and col'. Chilla de body but not the soul.

All around me, looks so shine, ask my Lord if all was mine.

Refrain:

Ain't but one train run dis track, it runs to Heaven an' right back.

Saint Peter waitin' at de gate says, "Come on sinner don't be late."

Refrain:

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"Every time I feel da Spirit movin' in my heart I will pray."

Romans 5:5b "God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love." The Living Bible<sup>1</sup>

Romans 8:26: "Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans." The Message<sup>2</sup>

Do you think of the Holy Spirit as active or passive, at work or stagnant? Why?

What effect can an active Holy Spirit have on your life? Could this be how the Spirit knows what we're trying to say when we pray, as Paul says in Romans 8:26?

How might this have helped the slaves when this song originated?

How might the Spirit help you today?

“Up on the mountain my Lord spoke, out a His mouth came fire and smoke.”

Exodus 19:18a *“All Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because Jehovah descended upon it in the form of fire; the smoke billowed into the sky as from a furnace.”* The Living Bible<sup>1</sup>

What symbolism might this image have had for the slaves? For the Israelites? What does it mean to you?

“In the valley, on my knees, ask my Lord, mercy please.”

Ezra 9:9a *“For we are slaves, but in Your love and mercy You did not abandon us to slavery.”* The Living Bible<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Samuel 9:16b *“For I have looked down on them in mercy and have heard their cry.”* The Living Bible<sup>1</sup>

What is the significance to you, of comparing God on the mountain and flawed, sinful humans in the valley?

What valley do you find yourself in? How does that make you feel? What mercy might you request from God?

“Jordan River, chilly and col’. Chilla de body but not the soul.”

The Jordan River could be a metaphor for the challenges of life that get us down, but don’t defeat us. Think about the challenges the slaves faced in the pre-Civil War era when this song likely originated. How do those challenges compare to the challenges people of color face today? What has changed? What hasn’t?

In what ways can you help keep their “Jordan River” from chilling their souls?

“All around me, looks so shine, ask my Lord if all was mine.”

Galatians 4:4-7 *“But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent His Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that He might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law. Thus we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage. You*

*can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as His own children because God sent the Spirit of His Son into our lives crying out ‘Papa! Father!’ Doesn’t that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child you’re also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance.”*

The Message<sup>2</sup>

Matthew 5:5 *“The meek and lowly are fortunate! For the whole world belongs to them.”*

The Living Bible<sup>1</sup>

Do you think Paul’s letter to the Galatians helps to clarify who actually inherits the kingdom of God? When you feel trapped in a situation not of your own making, can you find encouragement from this? How?

What does this say about the faith exemplified in this song, that those who originally sang it felt that they could ask if they owned anything? How does that compare to how you feel about God and God’s promises? Is there something you can learn from this song? Spend some time with the idea. Offer your thoughts and feelings about it to God.

“Ain’t but one train run dis track, it runs to Heaven an’ right back.  
Saint Peter waitin’ at de gate says, “Come on sinner don’t be late.””

It’s been said that this could be a reference to the Underground Railroad – or any road to freedom – and that when the line about Saint Peter was sung, it was a message to get ready to leave.

Are there any songs that are a call to action for you? Which ones? What do they call you to do? Spend some time with that call. Share it with God and ask for the Spirit’s guidance as you look at carrying out your call.

**“Even when walking through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid, for You are close beside me, guarding, guiding all the way.”**

Psalm 23:4 The Living Bible<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Message Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson.